

Iraq sees triumph over 'time-bomb' dinars

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq asserted Tuesday it had dealt a blow to its enemies, notably Gulf Arab states and rebellious Kurds, by scrapping tens of billions of foreign-made dinars. Iraq reopened its borders at midnight (2000 GMT) Monday after closing them for six days while it withdrew foreign-made 25-dinar notes from circulation. State-run Baghdad Radio said the operation to cancel the notes and replace them inside the country with Iraqi-printed notes had saved Iraq from economic sabotage. The operation "foiled the plot of our enemies who sought to exploit the sufferings of Iraq," it said, referring to the Gulf Arab states and to Iraqi Kurds who control the north of the country in defiance of Baghdad. Gulf Arab monarchies had stashed away 12 billion dinars for use as economic "time-bombs," it said, while the Kurds challenged Iraq's sovereignty over the north. But their dinars were now worthless. Baghdad newspapers said the dinar operation would also reduce the impact of U.N. sanctions imposed after the August 1990 invasion of Kuwait. "The embargo against Iraq will fall apart thanks to the genius of its leader," President Saddam Hussein, said the defence ministry paper Al Qadisiya. Kurds seek U.N. help, page 2

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Jordan recognises Eritrea independence

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan Tuesday decided to recognise the independence of Eritrea which will be officially declared May 24. The decision, taken in a Cabinet session held under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker, also provides for establishing ties with Eritrea.

Utoum named NAF chief

AMMAN (Petra) — The Cabinet Tuesday approved appointing Mansour Al Utoum as director general of the National Aid Fund (NAF). Mr. Utoum has been working as secretary of the Council of Ministers. The Cabinet also approved the list of doctors who will accompany the Jordanian pilgrimage mission to Saudi Arabia. The list includes the name of 38 doctors, pharmacists and nurses. It also approved raising the personal increment for the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) and the Public Transport Corporation to JD 15. The Council of Ministers also approved granting the Arab Potash Company a concession to look for limestone east of Qatranah over an area of 9,000 dunums. Investment in the project is expected to be more than \$200 million and to bring annual dividends of \$40-50 million in hard currency.

'Kuwait fires had no effect on climate'

NAIROBI (AFP) — Smoke from Kuwait oil wells set ablaze during the Gulf war had no effect on the global climate, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said Tuesday. An updated scientific report on the environmental effects of the Gulf war published by the agency said: "Because of the low altitude, which never exceeded 6,000 metres, the smoke plume from the burning oil wells had no impact on the global climate." The report said air pollution by the burning oil was not severe enough to cause acute health problems on human beings, but possible long-term effects on health are still unknown. It said the concentration of metals such as nickel, chromium and lead from the fires was low, compared to atmospheric metal concentration in urban and industrial areas of Japan, Western Europe and the United States.

Sudan denies harbouring expelled extremists

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — Sudan denied on Tuesday reports in Egypt that hundreds of Muslim extremists expelled from Pakistan have arrived in Khartoum. Over the weekend, Egyptian newspapers reported without attribution that around 230 Muslim extremists expelled from Pakistan have been received in Khartoum. The London-based Lebanese newspaper Al Hayat published the same report Tuesday, attributed to a source in the Egyptian Foreign Ministry. "It is a lie," said Hussein Abdeen, a senior official of the Foreign Ministry in Khartoum. "This has never happened. And we have no further comment."

Algerian blast suspect takes ill

ALGIERS (AFP) — The alleged ringleader of a bombing that left nine dead at Algiers airport last year took ill again during questioning Tuesday in the trial of 55 defendants in the attack blamed on Muslim fundamentalists. Hocin Abderrahim, a former senior aide of Abassi Madani who heads the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), fell ill a half-hour into his second round of questioning by a special Algiers court. At his first round Sunday, he had to leave the courtroom after a sudden bout of vomiting, after retracting a televised confession he had made last October and declaring himself "innocent" of any involvement in the August 1992 blast at Algiers International Airport in which 123 were also injured. The court Tuesday carried on with questioning of a sixth defendant, Karim Fennouh.

Bilaterals continue with token Palestinian team

Response to Israeli proposal expected; Syria says security issues discussed

WASHINGTON (Agencies) — A Palestinian delegation reduced in size in protest against Israel continued bilateral discussions with Israel Tuesday at the Middle East peace talks here amid positive signs on the Syrian-Israeli track of negotiations.

The Palestinian delegation was cut Monday from 12 members to three to protest Israel's failure to respect its commitments on human rights in the occupied territories. Sources close to the Palestinian delegation said the team would remain at three until the end of the current round Thursday, making it unlikely to achieve tangible progress. However, the other members of the delegation were expected to remain in Washington even if they did not attend the talks.

On Monday, Israeli delegation chief Elyakim Rubinstein expressed regret over the move and said the Palestinians had failed to live up to their "pledge" on participation in the peace talks.

Despite the protests, Palestinians indicated they would make a counter-proposal to Israel's autonomy plan for the West Bank and Gaza Strip that would be brought back from Tunis by

negotiator Faisal Hussein. Mr. Hussein said in Tunis that the Palestinian proposals would be placed on the negotiating table later Tuesday or Wednesday.

The proposals were a "framework" for an agreement on interim Palestinian self-rule prior to a final settlement, he told AFP, without giving details. It also "lays down the basis for the next stage, that of a Palestinian state."

Israel has offered limited autonomy over a five-year period while the permanent status of the occupied territories is determined, a proposal rejected by the Palestinian negotiators.

Earlier, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) said Palestinian negotiators would not present their conditions for Palestinian interim self-rule until Israel and the United States fulfil the promises made to bring them back to the talks.

"Our draft is ready. But it will not be presented until the conditions for serious negotiations are met. These conditions are the commitments made earlier by Israel and by the U.S. administration to the Palestinian side," said Jamil Hilal, director of the PLO Information Department.

The PLO leadership which met at the weekend in Tunis, rejected the Israeli draft agreement on self-rule and drew up the counter-offer for the Israeli delegation.

He said if the current round of talks ended without progress, the PLO leadership and members of the negotiating team would meet in Tunis to assess the situation.

Mr. Hilal said that among the confidence building measures promised to the Palestinians was speeding of the return of about 400 Palestinians expelled last December to South Lebanon.

Israel offered on Monday to allow 25 more of the deportees to return home, in addition to the 101 already announced.

"This is a drip-feed. The U.S. promises were talking about a sizeable number," Mr. Hilal said, dismissing the Israeli offer.

He said the other human rights issues on which there had been promises either from Israel or the United States were:

• Reuniting of Palestinian families in the occupied territories; • Release of prisoners held in "administrative detention," without trial or charge;

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Rabin wins 1-week reprieve for coalition

TEL AVIV (Agencies) — Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin saved his coalition government from imminent collapse Tuesday when warring factions agreed a week-long truce.

After a series of dramatic last-minute meetings in parliament, Interior Minister Aryeh Deri, an ultra-orthodox rabbi, and Education Minister Shulamit Aloni agreed to become ministers without portfolio for seven days.

During that time Mr. Rabin, who takes over both education and interior posts, will endeavour to reconcile their differences.

Mr. Deri, of the Shas religious party, tendered his resignation Sunday demanding that Mrs. Aloni, leader of the Meretz Party, be shifted from education following her outspoken comments on the Jewish religion.

Mr. Rabin sealed the deal just minutes before Mr. Deri's resignation was due to be effective, leaving the coalition without a majority in parliament.

Shas has six members in the 120-seat Knesset (parliament).

Meretz has 12 seats and the premier's Labour Party 44, leaving the coalition five short of a majority without Shas.

Mr. Rabin, who warned that the breakup of the coalition threatened the peace talks, would rule with a minority coalition, said Shimon Sheves, director general of the premier's office.

The Labour-led government is not likely to lose a vote of confidence in parliament as it enjoys the support of five Arab-Israeli and communist members. But Mr. Rabin refuses to bring them into a coalition.

Mrs. Aloni said she and her party decided "to give the prime minister another week to continue the negotiations."

"After the cabinet meeting Deri withdrew his resignation letter," Deputy Religious Affairs Minister Raphael Pinchasi of Shas said.

The agreement between Mr. Deri and Mrs. Aloni was reached after a flurry of meetings and a standoff since Sunday when Mr. Deri handed in his resignation.

Western oil tax seen sharply depressing Gulf economies

ABU DHABI (AFP) — A proposed Western oil tax is expected to depress Gulf economies by more than 16 per cent over the next four decades after years of rapid growth, an official Gulf study said Tuesday.

The study by the Doha-based Gulf Organisation for Industrial Consultancy (GOIC) is the latest in a series of reports about the impact of the proposed taxes and coincided with Tuesday's talks in Brussels between the foreign ministers of the European Community (EC) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

"There is no doubt such taxes, if implemented, will affect the interests of the GCC countries and their future generations," it said. The taxes will cost the GCC 16.7 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) between 1990 and 2030 given their impact on oil demand, it said.

The GCC states — Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — already suffer from a decline in GDP as a result of lower oil prices, which slashed their revenues to around \$70 billion in 1992 from more than \$180 billion in 1981.

Although oil was losing ground to other sectors given GCC attempts to diversify income sources, that decline was the main reason for the drop in the GDP to \$180 billion in 1991 from \$219 in 1981.

GCC foreign ministers were to explain this to their EC counterparts during their talks in Brussels.

The EC tax, which it says is designed to contain the emission of carbon dioxide, will levy a further \$10 on an imported barrel of oil by the year 2000 while that in the United States will add \$3.5.

"GCC states feel they are being stabbed in the back by such taxes as they have offered a lot of sacrifices to keep oil prices at reasonable levels to avert any harm to the world economy," a Gulf official told AFP.

The Gulf's main oil producers in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE — have long played a crucial role in countering pressure by such OPEC hawks as Iran, Libya and Algeria to push up prices. Saudi Arabia played the main part, opening its tap when prices go up and tightening it when they sharply go down.

Exiles reject new Israeli offer to allow 25 to return

MARJ AL-ZOHOUR, Lebanon (Agencies) — Some 400 Palestinian expellees stranded for almost five months in South Lebanon on Tuesday rejected an Israeli offer for 25 more of them to return, their spokesman said.

"The Israeli proposal contains no new element and does not even deserve to be considered," said Abdul Aziz Rantisi, a leading member of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas).

He said the expellees insisted on returning in a single group, as laid down by United Nations Resolution 799.

The latest offer was part of an agreement to end the crisis reached between the United States and Israel on Feb. 1, said Mahmud Zahar, another Hamas leader at the exiles' camp of Marj Al Zohour.

The exiles had already rejected that deal under which 101 of the remaining 396 men from the Israeli-occupied territories would return immediately and the rest by the end of the year.

Israel originally expelled 415 on Dec. 17 for up to two years for their alleged links to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The decision to allow back another 25 was announced Monday in Washington by the spokesman for the Israeli delegation to the Middle East peace talks, Yossi Gal.

Sheikh Abdullah Shami, an Islamic Jihad official at the camp between Israeli and Lebanese army lines, said the offer was a "slap in the face" for the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Palestinian negotiators who had returned to the talks with high hopes.

But several were glued to their radios, hoping to hear the names of the 25 allowed to return.

Bassam Jarar, another Muslim fundamentalist, said the expelled Palestinians were always ready to consider new Israeli proposals but "the decision to repatriate only 25 more deportees is far from acceptable."

Palestinian negotiators also rejected the offer. Dr. Rantisi said the Palestinian delegation should withdraw from the talks immediately.

"If we had in the past found excuses for the delegation to attend the talks, though there are no justifications, then today it has no excuses to stay at the negotiating table," he told reporters.



Incoming and outgoing oil tankers clog the main border crossing early Tuesday (photo by Youssef Al Amman-Baghdad highway near the border crossing at Trebell after Iraq lifted a six-day closure of

Iraq opens border, resumes oil flow; but few Iraqis coming out

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Normal traffic resumed across the Jordanian-Iraqi border Tuesday after Iraq lifted a six-day closure of the frontier to reinforce the invalidation of billions of dollars in pre-crisis Iraqi currency.

Tankers carrying Iraqi oil started rolling as soon as the closure was lifted, but the number of Iraqis coming to Jordan appeared to have gone down dramatically as a result of a high travel tax.

Several hundred Iraqis and dozens of Jordanians crossed into Iraq during the first few hours after the border point at Trebell, 330 kilometres north-east of Amman, was opened at midnight Monday, officials said.

"The initial rush in passenger traffic is over and we are

now handling more of the trucks and tankers," an official said Tuesday afternoon.

The border closure was total since late Thursday. Even senior Iraqi diplomats were turned away from the border point, and army units supported by members of the elite Republican Guards patrolled the 600-kilometre desert frontier during the closure to check currency smuggling.

The ruling Revolutionary Command Council chaired by President Saddam Hussein decreed the invalidation of 25-dinar banknotes printed before the Gulf crisis and had set a Monday deadline for the exchange of the once-premium priced currency for new bills at state-run Al Rashid and Al Rafidain banks within Iraqi government-controlled territory (Kurdish rebels seek U.N. help, page 2).

The border closure prevented the bulk of the invalidated currency held outside Iraq by speculators and Saddam opponents seeking the economic collapse of the country from finding its way to Iraq ahead of the exchange deadline of Monday noon.

Iraq has accused the governments of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of hoarding the old notes and encouraging speculators to do so in a bid to force Baghdad to print more notes without supporting gold reserves or monetary base.

It also charged that Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Israel, and Iran were flooding the Iraqi market with forged notes.

According to Iraqi diplomats and economic analysts, less than 10 per cent of the 25-dinar

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Sudan says it will 'mobilise' in Halaib; Egypt says it wants no war

CAIRO (Agencies) — Sudan said Tuesday it would mobilise to handle a border dispute with Egypt following an Egyptian ultimatum for it to withdraw police from the remote Halaib triangle.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said he would not go to war over Halaib.

An aide to Mr. Mubarak said he was speaking to Kuwaiti newspaper editors before flying to Bahrain on a Gulf tour.

"I do not like bloodshed and will not go to war with Sudan," the aide quoted Mr. Mubarak as saying. "Our ties with Sudan are historic and the people of Sudan should never pay for the mistakes of any regime," he said.

Mr. Mubarak, on a tour of Gulf Arab states, was speaking before Sudan announced it was

taking mobilisation measures.

Sudanese radio Tuesday quoted Ghazi Salaheddin, minister of state of President Omar Hassan Al Bashir's office, as saying the dispute with Egypt posed a threat to security.

"He (Salaheddin) reviewed the latest developments in the Halaib issue and said Sudan would be taking mobilisation measures in this regard," said the radio. It did not define the measures.

The border dispute, dormant for decades, flared early last year. The two neighbours fell out over Egyptian charges that Sudan trained guerrillas to export Islamic revolution.

Both sides claim sovereignty over the Halaib but for decades Egypt did not challenge government offices Sudan maintained

there to administer the affairs of nomadic tribes.

Egypt has strengthened its security presence in the region and started to build schools and mosques designed to bolster Cairo's influence. It is not clear whether Sudan still has a government presence.

Press reports in Khartoum said Tuesday that the "operations room" of the People's Organisation for Defending the Faith and the Nation had decided at its first meeting Monday to start recruiting volunteers to defend Halaib.

The so-called operations room organising committee was also sending a memorandum of support to junta leader Bashir with copies to the United Nations, the Arab League and the Organisation of African Unity.

Israel says the problems of refugees would not be solved in this working group, which would focus instead on improving their quality of life.

Pressure for results at talks on refugees

OSLO (Agencies) — Talks on the plight of millions of Middle East refugees opened in Norway Tuesday, with delegates under pressure to produce results at their third attempt.

"If the delegation returns with nothing in hand, it will be difficult to return again," the coordinator for the Palestinians, told Reuters. The agency named the man only as Abu Ala.

"After 18 months, something has to be achieved," he said.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Joergen Holst opened the talks in Oslo, the third session of a working group designed to support the main Middle East peace talks in Washington.

"Families have been separated and violated by the conflict in the Middle East. You must find ways of reuniting them or reconnecting the human bonds," Mr. Holst told the delegates before three days of scheduled closed talks.

The multilateral working group on refugees is one of five groups established by the United States and Russia in January 1992 to study aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The other include arms control, economic development and the environment.

The Oslo meeting "deals with one of the central issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that is the refugee problem," said Israeli delegate Johanan Bein.

Israel boycotted the first round of the Group's talks in Ottawa in May last year because "of the participation of Palestinian 'exiles' from outside the occupied territories."

The second round in Ottawa in November 1992 delayed after Israel objected to the participation of the head of the Palestinian delegation because he was a member of the Palestine National Council (PNC).

But since a change of government in Israel, it has allowed the participation of Palestinians from outside the occupied territories provided they are not members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation ("PLO"), the PNC or from East Jerusalem.

"We don't want to boycott the meeting, and we don't want to delay anything," Amos Ganor, coordinator of the Israeli delegation, told Reuters.

"We came here to make progress and we are confident that other parties are here with the same approach," he said.

"At the moment, the mood is not good," said Mr. Abu Ala. He is not allowed to join the actual meeting due to his affiliation with the PLO but he advises the delegation from his hotel room.

The Palestinian delegation hoped the Oslo talks would touch on human rights, family reunification, the right of return, and help solve the nearly 400 expellees stranded in South Lebanon for nearly five months.

Israel says the problems of refugees would not be solved in this working group, which would focus instead on improving their quality of life.

Jordanian left seeks to forge united front

By Sausan Ghosheh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Leftist parties stand little chance in gaining ground in the next parliamentary elections unless they form some sort of coalition after overcoming some of their differences, political analysts say.

The Jordanian press has heard different stories on the formation of the "Leftist Union" by three political parties: the Jordanian Socialist Democratic Party (JSDP), the Jordanian Democratic People's Party (JDPP), and the Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity Party (JDPU).

JDPU Secretary-General Azmi Al Khawaja said: "There are leftist parties that are similar in essence, beliefs, political broadlines and to a certain extent in their internal structure...thus, an open dialogue

was initiated to unite their efforts."

Until now, however, Mr. Khawaja said, there is no final agreement on the creation of such a union. Dialogue is still ongoing between the three political parties and a joint committee was formed to draft the programmes and projects of the proposed union, he said.

Other leftist parties were also asked to join the union, but there are several obstacles before this may be achieved. Mr. Khawaja said. Talks, however, are still proceeding between the advocates of the union and other leftist parties.

The main obstacle is the dissension plaguing the leftist parties, he said.

There are six licensed leftist parties in Jordan, three of which have dissented from two older parties. The Jordanian Progressive Democratic Party,

not part of the "Leftist Union," was founded by JDPP dissidents. The Freedom Party, outside the "Leftist Union," and the JSDP, an advocate of the union, are both splinter groups of the Jordanian Communist Party, which is outside the union.

Another obstacle in a merger of Jordan's left is the difference of opinions these parties hold in regard to the Arab-Israeli peace process; some of them support the talks while others reject the process, Mr. Khawaja said.

In addition, he said, those leftist parties which are not part of the dialogue to establish a united front, fear that the creation of a leftist union will "limit the scope of alliances."

Mr. Khawaja explained that they fear the name of the union "may prevent Arab nationalist and democratic parties" from

forming a coalition with the leftist parties.

He stressed that the leftist union is "not going to be the last of the alliances," and that the JDPP, the JDPU and the JSDP all hope to build alliances with other democratic forces and to form a broad national coalition.

The Leftist Union, if formed, will be headed by a joint leadership committee from the parties who decide to become part of it, Mr. Khawaja said. There will also be a joint council of central committee members of the parties, and separate councils handling affairs in the different regions of Jordan, he added.

There is also a plan to unite the women, youth and worker organisations that sprung from the different parties. Mr. Khawaja said. But, the total amal-

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Palestinian economy strangled by Israel

By Sami Aboudi
Reuters

RAMALLAH, Occupied West Bank — Israel's six-week-old closure of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip has brought the Palestinian economy to the verge of collapse, Palestinian economists and businessmen said Tuesday.

Factories and businesses with plummeting sales are laying off workers, farmers cut off from their markets are leaving crops to rot, and families whose breadwinners have lost jobs in Israel are eating into meager savings to survive.

"People are using up the last of their savings. Large numbers of families are edging closer towards hunger," Palestinian economist Samir Helele said.

Factory owners say sales have halved and many businesses face imminent closure.

Israel sealed off the nearly two million Palestinians of the occupied territories in an ostensible bid to curb Arab attacks on Jews inside Israel.

The closure has not only robbed the occupied territories of their main export and jobs market — Israel. It has also isolated commerce and transport within occupied territories by cutting off the West Bank from Gaza and splitting the West Bank into two halves north and south of Jerusalem.

Samir Abdullah, a leading economist and member of the Palestinian delegation to Middle East peace talks, said the output of goods and services had dropped by between 50 and 60 per

cent. Economists estimate the occupied territories' gross national product is \$3 billion a year.

"The cumulative effect of the Israeli closure is going to be double the immediate impact," Dr. Abdullah said.

The Palestinian economy has already been weakened by a five-year revolt against Israeli rule and the loss of remittances from workers in the Gulf.

A study published on Tuesday by the United Nations Development Programme, said gross domestic product fell by 12 per cent a year for three years from 1988 to 1990 and unemployment reached up to 40 per cent, with conditions worst in Gaza.

Up to 100,000 Palestinians worked in Israel before the closure. Israel has announced permission for up to 35,000 to return but not all have taken up their permits.

Since it occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the 1967 Middle East war, Israel has hampered independent growth of the Palestinian economy.

Some 300 Palestinian stone-cutting factories, once dependent on the booming Israeli construction industry, have lost more than half of their revenues, factory owners say.

Sales at the Silvana company in the West Bank town of Ramallah, one of the largest Palestinian food processing plants, have fallen 30 per cent, manager Garabed Mardirossian said. He has sent his 170 workers off on vacation to cope with the fall.

"But unless the closure ends soon, we may be forced to start laying off workers," he said.



SEMBLANCE OF NORMALCY: Italian soldiers of the U.N. peacekeeping force in the Somalia capital of Mogadishu stand guard on the city's "green line" (AFP photo)

Iraqi Kurds appeal to U.N. for urgent aid after dinar switch

PARIS (AFP) — Iraqi Kurds have appealed to the United Nations for urgent aid to counter the dire economic fall-out of Baghdad's withdrawal of foreign-printed dinar notes.

Iraqi Kurdistan faces "economic devastation" because of the operation to switch 25-dinar notes, they warned in a message to U.N. Secretary General Boutros Ghali received here Tuesday.

Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani called for the United Nations to use Iraqi assets frozen abroad to ease the economic crisis in northern Iraq, which is controlled by the Kurds in defiance of Baghdad.

The humanitarian aid programme for the Kurds would have to be revived unless Baghdad was forced to exchange the foreign-printed 25-dinars used in Iraqi Kurdistan, they said.

The two leaders also called for Kurdistan to be partially exempted from the U.N. trade embargo imposed on Iraq since its invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, noting the Kurds were isolated from the rest of the country.

Iraq boasted Tuesday it had dealt a blow to its enemies, notably Gulf Arab states and rebel Kurds, by scrapping tens of billions of dinars held abroad and in Kurdistan.

It reopened its borders late Monday after closing them for six days while it withdrew foreign-made 25-dinar notes from circulation and replaced them inside the country with Iraqi-printed notes.

The operation "foiled the plot of our enemies who sought to exploit the sufferings of Iraq," Baghdad Radio said, referring mockingly to the Gulf Arab states.

It charged that the dinars held outside Baghdad's control were to have been used as "time-bombs" to sabotage the Iraqi economy, while the Kurds were using foreign-printed notes to challenge Iraqi sovereignty over the north.

The dinar operation has rocked the economy of Iraqi Kurds, as the closure of the borders also cut off the Kurds from the rest of the country.

The operation was designed to end speculation over the value of the dinar and reassert state control by cancelling foreign-printed notes, known as Swiss dinars, held abroad.

The dinar, which is worth \$3.2 at the official rate, now trades at below 50 dinars to the dollar on the black market following the withdrawal of the Swiss dinars and other moves to shore up the currency.

The withdrawal operation has shaken both the economy of the self-proclaimed Iraqi Kurdistan — which won a measure of autonomy after Iraq lost the 1991 Gulf war — and the confidence of its leaders.

A solution to the monetary crisis "does not depend on us. We don't have the legal power to print our own money," lamented Ahmad Bamarni, a deputy in the self-proclaimed Kurdish parliament.

"Kurds who had previously put their confidence in the 'Swiss' dinars — valued at three to four times more than the local ones — ended up with worthless notes."

Hundreds of men, most wearing the traditional baggy trousers, rushed to banks in Erbil, a city of almost one million, to fill out forms listing the number of 25-dinar notes they had as well as their serial numbers.

The Kurdish "government," which is not recognised internationally, will then have an idea how much money is affected. It is not clear what steps the so-called government will then take.

"That's the (biggest) challenge we are facing since the government was formed" last June, the Kurdish deputy interior minister, Ahmad Sherif Ali, told AFP.

The Kurdish people are worried, confused and hoping their self-styled government can find a solution to yet another economic problem. In the past two years Baghdad had also prevented many goods from reaching Kurdistan.

"Our government must help us," said Talaat Jamil, an unemployed man who was standing outside the branch of the Baghdad-run Al Rafidain bank.

With a plastic bag of "cursed" banknotes in hand, he said: "I am sure the Iraqi government will do the same with the 10- and five-dinar notes" which were also printed abroad.

Yemen's top parties merge after election

SANAA (R) — The two parties that ruled North and South Yemen until the country was reunited three years ago have agreed to merge into a single political party that would have an absolute majority in Yemen's newly-elected parliament.

A statement from the two parties said the accord was signed Monday by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, leader of the General People's Congress (GPC), and Vice-President Ali Salem Al Baidh, who heads the formerly Marxist Yemen Socialist Party (YSP).

The conservative GPC, which ruled the former North Yemen, emerged as the largest single party from the April 27 election for united Yemen's first parliament.

Results from this first multi-party poll in Yemen have yet to be finalised because of complaints about irregularities in some constituencies and because some legislators elected as independents have joined one or other of the parties.

But even if the contested seats and their independent followers are not counted, the two parties together could muster an absolute majority of at least 164 seats of the 301 seats in the parliament, which is due to hold its first session Saturday.

According to Monday's accord, the two parties will start their merger by forming a united parliamentary bloc.

The uneasy 50-50 coalition between two parties with differing ideologies worked reasonably smoothly after the 1990 merger, diplomats in Sanaa said.

They agreed to cooperate during the elections in which the main challenge came from an

Islamist coalition led by Hashed tribal leader Sheikh Abdullah Hussein Al Ahmar.

Sheikh Ahmar's pro-Saudi Yemeni Gathering for Reform (YGR) won at least 52 seats in the election and has been holding talks with President Saleh on a broad-based government to lead impoverished Yemen out of deep economic problems and regional isolation.

The GPC and YSP agreed in their merger document that they would uphold multi-party democracy and continue to lead the country towards economic liberalisation and uphold the principles of justice, freedom and human rights.

The merger should also help President Saleh's efforts to merge the armed forces, which remain separate with the northern army controlled by the GPC and the southern army by the YSP.

The two parties also agreed to propose amending the constitution to provide for direct elections of a future president and vice-president.

They also called for the creation of an upper house to be called the Shura (consultative) council where the country's provinces would be equally represented, in contrast with parliament where seats are allocated in relation to population.

The Shura would help redress the balance between the more populous north and the south which accounts for only about 2.5 million of Yemen's 14 million people.

The constitutional amendments are expected to be approved by parliament at its first meeting.

Major defies Iranian threats, holds meeting with Rushdie

LONDON (AP) — Defying Iranian threats to damage trade, Prime Minister John Major Tuesday met Salman Rushdie, the author under death sentence for writing "The Satanic Verses."

Mr. Major and Mr. Rushdie met for about 30 minutes at the prime minister's offices at 10 Downing Street, according to a spokeswoman for Mr. Major. It was the first such gesture of support from a British prime minister since the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini pronounced the "fatwa" calling for Mr. Rushdie's death on Feb. 14, 1989.

This is the most important day of the campaign against the fatwa so far," a smiling Mr. Rushdie told reporters at an invitation-only news conference following his meeting with Mr. Major.

Mr. Rushdie said it "will send a message around the world, both to our allies and to the government of Iran."

A spokeswoman in Major's office, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the prime minister had affirmed his government's full support for Mr. Rushdie's rights as a British citizen, and expressed regret that Iran had not repudiated the fatwa.

Mr. Rushdie said he was seeking a meeting with U.S. President Bill Clinton but that nothing had been agreed.

Mr. Major's move also posed a new threat to relations between Britain and Iran, increasingly

strained since Feb. 4 when Foreign Office Minister Douglas Hogg met Indian-born Rushdie, a naturalised Briton.

Iran was outraged then and accused Britain of double standards and spreading lies.

Last month, Iran warned that trade would suffer with Tehran and possibly other Muslim countries if Mr. Major met Mr. Rushdie, and reaffirmed the fatwa.

The meeting with Mr. Major culminated a change of policy by Britain during the past year after years of quiet diplomacy in the hope the death sentence would gradually wither away.

Some legislators in Mr. Major's governing Conservative Party had appealed to him not to meet Mr. Rushdie.

Last month, Peter Temple-Morris, chairman of the British-Iran parliamentary group, said he told Mr. Major "we were on a hiding to nothing and that he had been badly advised."

But Mr. Major replied that Britain had a "duty to defend fully the rights of a British citizen threatened in this way."

Iran says the death sentence is irrevocable and an Iranian charity has offered nearly \$2 million for Mr. Rushdie's death.

Iran severed ties with Britain in March 1989 over the Rushdie affair. Diplomatic links were restored 18 months later, but only at charge d'affaires level.

Israeli spy chief falls foul of British football

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The head of Israel's military intelligence service has fallen foul of his weakness for the rough and tumble of British football. When General Uri Saguy visited London in November 1991 he ordered his man in the capital to buy four tickets for a top-flight match at a cost of £72 pounds (\$100). The military attaché put it on his expenses for entertaining Gen. Saguy, a football fanatic. Accountants queried the unusual claim but Gen. Saguy refused to explain his secret mission. The state comptroller or Israel's ombudsman got involved and criticised the general in an annual report published Tuesday. The match was not identified. "It's an exceptional case and we oppose such expenditure," the army replied.

MIDDLE EAST NEWS IN BRIEF

King Fahd sends letter to Yemeni president

SANAA (R) — Saudi Arabia's King Fahd sent a letter to Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh Tuesday, the latest sign of an improvement in strained relations over Yemen's support of Iraq in the Gulf war. Saudi Education Minister Abdul Aziz Al Abdullah told reporters on arrival in Sanaa that he would deliver the letter, that deals with mutual relations. King Fahd and Mr. Saleh carried this year exchanged letters on talks on a dispute over a potentially oil-rich border region. The education minister heads the Saudi team to the border negotiations. His visit, the second this year, follows Yemen's first multi-party elections on April 27. Gulf Arab countries cut off aid to Yemen when it supported Iraq in the Gulf war over Kuwait, but relations have been improving in recent months. The United States, which led the allied forces that defeated Iraq in the Gulf war, has said the Yemeni elections could help improve strained ties between the two countries.

Kuwaiti graft probe to demand documents — paper

KUWAIT (R) — A parliamentary probe into charges of corruption in Kuwait's Defence Ministry is to ask the ministry for documents on all arms purchases made since the Gulf war, a newspaper reported Tuesday. "We decided to ask for the text of letters exchanged between ministry officials while discussing the deals," the paper said. A five-member sub-committee headed by Mr. Baqer was formed this month to probe allegations by parliamentarians that a ministry official made tens of millions of dollars worth deals concluded since the conflict that ended Iraq's seven-month occupation. "The committee, in its first meeting on Monday, reviewed the system of arms purchases adopted by the ministry and the funds paid," Mr. Baqer was quoted as saying. The sub-committee included a discussion of the allegations with retired Major General Ghazi Al Abdullah Razzaqa, a former armed forces deputy chief of staff for supply. Defence Minister Sheikh Ali Sabah Al Salem Al Sabah has denied repeated charges of corruption and mismanagement at the ministry and challenged parliamentarians to produce evidence. The sub-committee will report to a standing parliamentary fact-finding committee studying the government's handling of the crisis with Iraq that preceded the 1990 invasion. Deputy Mubarak Al Dawilah has said he has submitted documents "full of information" supporting the allegations to the sub-committee.

Libya says Iran will help resolve dispute

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran threw its support behind Libya and offered to help resolve its dispute with the west over the Lockerbie bombing, the Libyan foreign minister said here Monday. Omar Al Montasser said his visit here was part of Libya's efforts to win the support of non-aligned Asian countries for an easing of U.N. air traffic sanctions imposed on Libya last year. The sanctions were imposed after Tripoli refused to hand over to the United States or Britain two suspects in the bombing of a Pan American airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988, which killed 270 people. "We won the entire support of Iran which promised to do its best to help us solve this problem," Mr. Montasser said, ending a 36-hour visit. The Saudi-based Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) already asked the United Nations sanctions committee to allow a flight to carry Muslim pilgrims from Libya to the holy city of Mecca, he said. There has been no response, he added. Mr. Montasser said recent statements by Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qadhafi against Muslim fundamentalist movements were not raised during his talks here with Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and other officials. The Libyan position "does not represent a problem between the two countries," he said.

U.S., Saudi Arabia sign deal for F-15s

ST. LOUIS (AP) — The United States and Saudi Arabia have signed a deal that will allow McDonnell Douglas Corp. to sell 72 F-15 fighter jets to the Royal Saudi Air Force, the company said Monday. The aircraft maker said the signing of a letter of offer and acceptance allows it to proceed with production of the fighters, worth \$9 billion, McDonnell Douglas won a \$122 million contract from the U.S. air force last December to begin ordering parts for the fighters. Former President George Bush approved the sale of the jets to Saudi Arabia in 1992. The deal averted the shutdown of the F-15 production line in St. Louis, saving 7,000 jobs in St. Louis and Tulsa and an estimated 33,000 other jobs with subcontractors across the country. Deliveries of the aircraft will begin in late 1995 and continue through 1998.

Israeli censors 'soft' on journalists — watchdog

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's military censors fail to punish journalists severely enough, according to a report by the state comptroller published on Tuesday. "The censors do their work faithfully, but do not punish the press severely enough when they violate censorship rules," state comptroller Miriam Ben Porat wrote in the annual report. Complaints from the censor's office to media which fail to submit sensitive articles to the censor are worded so "moderately" they fail to achieve "sufficient" deterrence to prevent scoops which can endanger state security. "The army's chief censor defended himself by arguing that the efficiency of the unit is shown by the small number of breaches despite the vast quantity of material which falls under his authority. The media has to submit to the censors anything linked to 'national security,' a term which embraces immigration from countries with which Israel is at war and energy imports as well as military questions. Israeli newspapers often appear with white spaces where the censor has struck out details. Palestinian newspapers have to submit everything to the censor daily. The censor can close newspapers, withdraw press accreditation and, exceptionally, expel foreign reporters. Two foreign journalists had their press cards temporarily withdrawn last November and two others were reprimanded after revealing that Israel was plotting to kill the Hizbollah leader in Lebanon.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO
18:00 Le Vol du Kangourou
19:00 News in French
19:15 French Varieties
19:30 News in Hebrew
20:00 News in Arabic
20:30 Special Programme
21:15 UEFA Cup Final
22:00 News in English
22:30 Second Half of Match
23:00 The Gravy Train

PRAYER TIMES

04:08 Fajr
05:34 (Sunrise) Duha
12:32 Dhur
16:12 Asr
19:28 Maghreb
20:55 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweileh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church, Tel. 632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terrence Church Tel. 622366

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 623541

*Anglican Church Tel. 630851, Tel. 623543
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771333
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751
Armenian International Church Tel. 635256
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 624328
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Tel. 623624, 654932
Church of the Nazareth Tel. 675691

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.
The Kingdom will remain under the effect of unstable weather conditions. Therefore it will be partly cloudy, with scattered showers falling at times, and winds will be northeasterly moderate to fresh. In Aqaba, it will be partly cloudy with a chance for scattered showers, and winds will be northerly fresh and seas wavy.

Min./Max. temp.
Amman 11 / 21
Aqaba 18 / 30
Deserts 11 / 25
Jordan Valley 18 / 28

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Ghazi Abu Sheikh 753405
Dr. Adnan Al Zughoul 898140
Dr. Nidal Al Dahleh 827195
Dr. Bassam Karadshah 796200
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Rafidoun pharmacy 778336
Al Azzam pharmacy 637055
Nairookh pharmacy 623672
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Nairookh pharmacy 623672
Najib pharmacy 847632

DRB:
Dr. Mohammad Al Za'bi (—)
Al Quds pharmacy (—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Mishal Al Hijawi (—)

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Emergency 630441
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 891228
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843632
Traffic Police 843630
Public Security Department 630221
Price Complaints 605800
Water and Sewerage 661176
Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Call Department 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 813813/32
Khafid Maternity, J. Amn. 642816
Akhil Maternity, J. Amn. 642412
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malha, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 664171/4
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Musah Hospital 667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali 661271/7
Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3
Al-Bashir, J. Ashrafieh 775111/26
Army, Al-Marka 891611/15
Queen Alla Hospital 09980732
Anaf Hospital 674155
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)903560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)980732
Al-Hikma Modern Hospital (09)99090
BRISA:
Princess Beerna Hospital (02)72555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)7275
Ibn Al-Nafis Hospital (02)72709

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)53200-5, where it should always be verified.

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)
06:00 Adco (RJ)
09:45 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
16:00 Agaba (RJ)
16:30 Jeddah (RJ)
16:40 Laraca (RJ)
17:30 London (RJ)
17:50 Frankfurt (RJ)
18:25 Istanbul (RJ)
18:30 Brussels, Paris (RJ)
19:30 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
19:30 Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
19:40 Toronto, Montreal (RJ)
19:40 Rome (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

05:45 Damascus (RJ)
07:40 Karachi (PJ)
10:30 Cairo (MS)
11:30 Sanaa (TY)
11:30 Jeddah (SU)
18:45 Damascus (PJ)
20:30 Paris, Damascus (AF)
21:45 Beirut (ME)
21:45 Laraca (LY)
22:45 Vienna, Laraca (OS)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)
07:45 Agaba (RJ)
11:30 Rome (RJ)
11:30 London, Berlin (RJ)
12:30 Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:40 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
12:40 Istanbul (RJ)
20:30 Colombo (RJ)
20:45 Agaba, Cairo (RJ)
21:45 Riyadh (RJ)
21:45 New Delhi (RJ)
22:45 Damascus (RJ)
23:45 Calcutta, Bangkok (RJ)
23:45 Sanaa (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

05:45 Beirut, Paris (AF)

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fil per kg.
Apple 700 / 700
Banana 680 / 680
Banana (Mukammal) 620 / 620
Beau 540 / 430
Cabbage 70 / 40
Carrot 150 / 90
Cauliflower 250 / 180
Cucumbers (large) 120 / 90
Cucumbers (small) 240 / 180
Eggplant 300 / 180
Garlic 260 / 180
Gracfruit 240 / 180
Lemon 580 / 500
Marrow (large) 90 / 50
Marrow (small) 130 / 100
Onion (dry) 320 / 80
Onion (green) 450 / 350
Pepper (hot) 600 / 250
Pepper (sweet) 450 / 350
Potato 210 / 100
Tomato 250 / 300
Spinach 250 / 200

Home News

Home News in Brief

King receives call from Sudanese leader

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein Tuesday received a telephone call from Sudanese leader Omar Hassan Al Bashir. King Hussein and Mr. Bashir discussed Jordanian-Sudanese relations and exchanged views on current Arab issues.

Human rights commission discusses draft law

AMMAN (Petra) — The Royal Commission for the Centre for Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights met Monday under its Chairman Najeeb Al Rashdan. The committee resumed discussion of the centre's draft law, focusing on the centre's pan-Arab role, Jordan's democratisation process and the centre's goals and objectives.

Irbid officials review water network plans

AMMAN (Petra) — Representatives of various government departments in Irbid governorate Tuesday held a meeting at the governorate house to discuss issues related to renewing the old water pipeline network in Irbid city. The participants reviewed ways of carrying out the JD 10 million project without causing any harm to existing services and infrastructure, such as electricity and telephone networks, as well as roads. At the conclusion of the meeting, Irbid Governor Fayez Al Abbadi decided to set up a follow-up committee which will be headed by Deputy Governor Hani Al Khayyat and will include representatives of government departments and companies implementing the project, which entails renewing 650 kilometres long of pipelines.

WHAT'S GOING ON

The following listings are compiled from monthly bulletins and the daily Arabic press. Readers are advised to verify the listed time and place with the concerned institutions.

EUROPEAN FILM WEEK

★ Spanish film entitled "La Casa De Bernarda Alba" (The House of Bernarda Alba) at 5 p.m. and French film entitled "La Discrete" (The Discreet) at 8 p.m. at the Royal Cultural Centre.

EXHIBITIONS

- ★ Exhibition of paintings by Adnan Al Sharif at Baladna Art Gallery.
- ★ Exhibition of Yemeni heritage which includes photos and paintings depicting development in Yemen, books on the history of Yemen, traditional costumes and handicrafts at Yarmouk University.
- ★ Exhibition of photos of His Majesty King Hussein and aspects of development in Jordan under his leadership at Yarmouk University.
- ★ Close-up photograph exhibition entitled "Intimate Petra" by Paula Williams-Brown and original embossed, hand-painted prints by Rima Farah at The Gallery, Inter-Continental Hotel.
- ★ Art exhibition entitled "The Legend of Petra II" by artist Suha Shoman at the National Gallery for Fine Arts.
- ★ Art exhibition by Jordanian artist Ahmad Nawash at the French Cultural Centre.
- ★ Art exhibition entitled "Fragments: Weavings and Works on Paper" by Kevin A. Hluch and Margaret M. Hluch at the American Centre.
- ★ Exhibition of paintings by Suha Katibah Noursi at the Spanish Cultural.
- ★ Exhibition of posters at the Goethe Institute.
- ★ Exhibition of photographs at the British Council.

LECTURE

★ Lecture, in Arabic, entitled "The Arab Freedom Movement and Democracy" by Mu'nis Al Razzaq at the Scientific and Cultural Centre of Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation — 6:30 p.m.

CHARITY CONCERT

★ Piano recital by Barbara Shashim at 4:30 p.m. at the Philadelphia Hotel. The proceeds of the recital, organised by the Italian Ladies of Amman, will benefit projects.

Envoy maintains Australia supports Mideast peace

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Australia's Ambassador to Jordan Jonathan Sheppard told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, Tuesday that his country was keen on maintaining very strong relations with Jordan and that Canberra fully supports efforts towards the establishment of peace and security in the Middle East.

Noting that Australia's Foreign Minister Gareth Evans visited Jordan last year, the ambassador said the visit reflected his country's keenness on bolstering its ties with the Arab World in general and with Jordan in particular.

Mr. Sheppard was commenting on remarks made by Mr. Evans published in the Australian press on May 6, 1993 which outraged Australia's Arab community and

Arab supporters. In his statement, Mr. Evans said that since 1991 the Australian government had been working behind the scenes to help Israel build some bridges with Asia, particularly with Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

"It is simply a matter of trying to help the process of bridge-building which may, in some instances, ultimately culminate in the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Southeast Asian Nations," the minister was then quoted as saying.

Ambassador Sheppard said in no way can these statements bring about any change in Australia's foreign policies, particularly towards the Middle East conflict.

Mr. Sheppard said Senator Evans' statement was motivated by the desire to help build what

he called "bridges of dialogue" with the Southeast Asian Nations, noting that the Middle East peace talks in Washington demonstrate the importance of dialogues to settle disputes among nations.

Mr. Evans' statement drew a reaction from the Jordanian ambassador to Australia, Mr. Sa'ad Bataineh, who said that Canberra's diplomatic overtures on behalf of Israel were a further example of a lack of balance in the policy towards the Middle East.

"We do not interfere with the Australian foreign policy — they can do what they want, but there is nothing even-handed about it," said Mr. Bataineh.

"Australia is always talking about being even-handed about the Middle East. What have done to promote Palestinian issues?" he asked.

Austrian ambassador opens UNRWA extension

AMMAN (J.T.) — Austrian Ambassador to Jordan Michael Stiglbauer Tuesday opened nine classrooms at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) school in Jabal El-Jofeh in Amman.

The rooms were constructed and equipped through a special contribution of \$366,500, which the Austrian government donated to UNRWA in the aftermath of the

Gulf crisis to help the agency cope with the increase in the school population.

The contribution also financed the construction and equipment of eleven other classrooms in UNRWA schools in the towns of Russefeh and Sweileh.

Dr. Stiglbauer and his wife, who were accompanied by Dennis Brown, the director of UNRWA affairs in Jordan, also vi-

sited Wihdat camp, where they attended school activities organised by the pupils.

Austria, which has hosted UNRWA's headquarters since 1978, last year donated about \$ one million to the agency's regular budget.

UNRWA runs 201 schools in Jordan, providing ten years of education to some 152,000 boys and girls.



PUBLIC SECURITY Department (PSD) Director General Major General Abdul Rahman Al Udwan Tuesday receives from German embassy Counsellor, Matthias Meyer, nine wireless communications devices (walkie-talkies), five bulletproof vests and a police observation car. Maj. Gen. Udwan voiced the Jordanian government's appreciation of the gift from the Federal German Office of Investigations and paid tribute to the current level of strong relations and close cooperation between the security services in the two countries.

Visiting Algerian team reviews Jordan's progress in education

AMMAN (Petra) — Despite various difficulties Jordan stresses the importance of the educational process, said Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Thounan Al Hindawi Tuesday.

During a meeting with visiting Algerian Minister of Education Ahmad Jabbar, Mr. Hindawi said His Majesty King Hussein has always focused his attention on the educational sector, adding that the Kingdom used to concentrate on educational legislations before forging on a programme to

improve the quality of education in the 1980s. Jordan's comprehensive educational development plan was the result of a careful evaluation process of all the aspects of education, he said.

Mr. Hindawi underlined the need to enhance Jordanian-Algerian relations and called for basing them on solid grounds of cooperation.

Mr. Jaber, who arrived in Amman Monday, commended Jordan's achievements in the field of

education and culture and landed the Kingdom's educational development plans.

He added that his government also plans to turn a new leaf in its cooperation with Arab countries, especially Jordan because of its distinguished experience in the fields of democratisation, economy and education.

The Algerian official was also received by University of Jordan President Fawzi Gharaibeh who briefed him on the development of the university.

Princess Sarvath announces formation of dyslexia society

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Royal Highness Princess Sarvath El Hassan announced Tuesday the formation of the Jordan Dyslexia Society under the patronage of His Majesty King Hussein.

The society is intended to act as a support group for dyslexic children and their parents, to spread awareness about the needs of dyslexic children and to ensure that provisions for children with learning disabilities are available and of the highest standard.

In her opening address at the Second International Symposium for Communication Disorders held by the Centre for Phonetics Research at the University of Jordan, Princess Sarvath outlined the three-year teacher training project coordinated by the Princess Sarvath College in a joint venture between the Jordanian and Canadian governments.

The Princess reviewed the activities and development of the Centre for Phonetics Research and referred in particular to the speech and hearing screening project to be conducted with the support of the Swiss government.

It is hoped that children throughout the country will be screened not only for speech and hearing disabilities, but also for language development difficulties, including dyslexia, Princess Sarvath explained.



Her Royal Highness Princess Sarvath El Hassan Tuesday addresses the Second International Symposium for Communication Disorders held at the Centre for Phonetics Research at the University of Jordan. On the podium are Swiss Ambassador to Jordan, (left) and (right) Director of the Centre for Phonetics Research Youssef Al Halls and University of Jordan President Fawzi Gharaibeh (Petra photo)

An estimated 25% of all children at some point in their life will experience significant learning difficulties which require special educational provision within their regular school, the Princess explained.

She stressed the need for an awareness amongst parents and educators of this widespread but often neglected problem, noting that an important component of the Kingdom's current Educational Reform Programme is to

ensure that children with any kind of learning difficulty shall not be at risk academically. The training project currently being coordinated by the Princess Sarvath College aims to train Jordanian teachers, counsellors and experts in the field of curriculum development on learning difficulties.

The project aims to ensure that all schools in Jordan have access to the resources and trained personnel needed to help children with any learning difficulty.

Princess Sarvath is the Patron of the Centre for Phonetics Research at the University of Jordan, which she opened officially in May 1990, together with the First International Symposium on Communication Disorders.

The opening ceremony of the Symposium was attended by Swiss Ambassador to Jordan Gian Federico Pedotti, University of Jordan President Fawzi Gharaibeh and Director of the Centre for Phonetics Research, Youssef Al Halls.

First group of pilgrims to depart for Mecca Saturday

AMMAN (J.T.) — The first congregation of Muslims to perform this year's pilgrimage to Mecca will leave Amman by road Saturday, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, which is organising a special farewell ceremony for the group.

In an announcement through the Jordan News Agency, Petra, Awqaf Minister Izzeddin Al Khatib Al Tamimi said that the first group includes Muslims from Jordan and the Israeli occupied West Bank.

A special ministry pilgrimage team will head for Saudi Arabia in advance of the group to receive them and make arrangements for their lodgings in Medina and Mecca, Sheikh Tamimi said.

He said the farewell ceremony will be held at Marj Al Hamam district, southwest of Amman, shortly before the pilgrims' departure.

Pilgrims from Palestinian lands occupied since 1948 and the Gaza Strip will leave Amman Sunday and Monday, the minister added. He called on the pilgrims to make arrangements for their transportation with the appropriate companies designated and urged them to carry their pilgrimage cards to facilitate their trip to and from the holy places.

According to the minister, all pilgrims should obtain vaccination certificates against meningitis and take precautionary measures in carrying safe foods and money.

Sheikh Tamimi attended the graduation ceremony of students at the ministry's Islamic Sciences College.

The minister distributed certificates to the graduates and awards to those who excelled.



Jordanian (right) and Iranian civil aviation officials Tuesday meet to discuss air transport operations between their countries (Petra photo)

Officials review prospects for Amman-Tehran air link

AMMAN (J.T.) — Civil Aviation officials from Jordan and Iran Tuesday opened talks here aimed at promoting air transport operations between Amman and Tehran.

The Jordanian side is headed by Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Director Ahmad Jweiber, and the Iranian team is led by Mohammad Najjryan, head of the Iranian Civil Aviation Authority.

The Jordan News Agency, Petra, said the talks, considered a follow up to discussion held last June, focused on ways to bolster civil aviation and air transport operations between the two countries, and included discussions on promoting Jordanian Iranian trade links.

A CAA spokesman was quoted saying that the two sides were discussing the prospect of linking Amman and Tehran through

direct flights and exchanging expertise in air transport.

He said the talks aim at upgrading a 1977 agreement on air transport.

Petra said the Iranian delegation is expected to tour civil aviation institutions, including the Queen Noor Civil Aviation Technical College, as well as the Royal Jordanian (RJ) aircraft maintenance unit at the Queen Alia International Airport.

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Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation. Established 1975

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Economic Forum

By Dr. Abdalla Malki

Sales tax — additional burden, not a revised tax system

The Jordanians have never been unified in their stand towards any economic issue as they have been unified against the looming general sales tax. The Jordanians who support this tax are indeed very few; nevertheless, the respective legislation will be enacted, as a provisional law if not as an ordinary one. By democratic standards and inasmuch as democracy is the rule of the majority, it is very legitimate to question, and feel puzzled about, the democratic content of our economic experience or about the economic content of the Jordanian democracy.

Every Jordanian group or sector has its own reasons to oppose the sales tax. And generally speaking, this tax has all the ills that go with taxation and particularly with indirect taxes. This means that the tax will eventually be paid by consumers and thus add to the costs of living. None of the reasons presented by the government and the zealots of the IMF-sponsored economic adjustment programme in defence of this tax is convincing or even academically sound. Indeed, there is rarely such a thing as good taxes; only bad, worse and less bad ones.

Admittedly, the position of those in charge of our economic policy is difficult to the point of being unenviable. They are caught between the devil and the deep sea. On the one hand, they are very well aware of the overwhelming popular resentment towards this tax. Government is the art of responding to the wishes of the people not the business of twisting their arms. On the other, they have to meet their commitments under the economic adjustment programme so that the members of the Paris Club may reschedule Jordan's maturing external loans. Our conviction is that the Jordanian officials, deep down, are also resentful of the new tax. In particular, they must be pondering the possible popular water and electricity tariffs which are planned to follow the sales tax.

Readers and some observers seem to believe that the author of this column, naturally, opposes the general sales tax. This impression is both right and wrong.

Unlike most groups and sectors, I do not oppose the sales tax for a special reason nor oppose it per se. The Jordanians have become overtaxed and, for that reason, I oppose any new taxes or fees, no matter what names they may carry. For the same reasons, I vehemently opposed the 1989 income tax hike when our marginal income tax rate was pushed to a shocking 55 per cent (plus five per cent in the so-called social services tax). If the sales tax, or for that matter any other taxes, were envisaged in a situation of low tax burden, I would have unhesitatingly welcomed the new tax.

And there is more to that. The sales tax — which is a prelude to the value added tax (VAT) — is nowadays conceived as part of a tax reform. We, in Jordan, are also adopting this slogan and announcing that we want the sales tax as a step towards overhauling our tax system. But, we, very unfortunately, are construing tax reform to mean more tax revenues and not, as it should, a better and modern tax system. Hereunder is the explanation.

In a proper tax reform, the sales tax and thereafter VAT replaces the income tax and is not an addition to it. Income and other direct taxes are criticised by modern fiscal schools on the grounds that they penalise production and, through that, savings. What should be penalised is consumption through shifting to a tax system based on indirect taxes, especially the sales tax. This means adoption of taxes as the sales tax and simultaneously the dropping or cutting of the income tax. We, in Jordan, want the proposed sales tax to supplement, not substitute, the income tax. Thus, our reformed tax system, as envisaged under the imminent sales tax and as it maintains high marginal income tax rates, penalises both saving and consumption and we get the worst of the two worlds. Hence my opposition to the general sales tax.

The Jordanian economy needs stimulation through lower, not higher, taxes. The sales tax goes, at this juncture, in the wrong direction.

They came to Beirut to keep peace

By Charles Krauthammer

WASHINGTON — The Bosnia debate is becoming a duel of historical analogies. The Clinton administration, looking for ways to prepare the public for intervention in Bosnia, is fastening on Somalia, a relatively painless relative success.

Now, Somalia and Bosnia have only one thing in common. Neither conflict is a vital American interest at stake. They are both examples of humanitarian intervention. To be sure, Bosnia interventionists strain mightily to produce some U.S. national interest, such as the spectre of dominoes falling across Eastern Europe all the way to the Baltic. These efforts have come to little.

Considerations of national interest do not figure in current policy. Some interventionists are motivated by reason of national interest. But they do not inhabit the Clinton administration. Mr. Clinton's reaction to Mr. Bush did in Somalia: to the pictures.

Why not? So if Somalia why not Bosnia? Because Somalia met the paramount criterion for purely humanitarian intervention: costlessness. The Somali operation was a species of earthquake relief. In Somalia, U.S. troops provided a relief delivery service with a little policing on the side. But it was not war-making.

The administration holds fast to the belief that Bosnia is not war-making either. It is peacekeeping. Mr. Clinton's social engineers believe that if you put the word "peacekeeper" on the uniforms of Americans, the war-makers are not going to shoot.

Yet 32 peacekeepers have already been killed in Bosnia (and their mission is far more passive than the one with which Americans will be charged). And there is that seminal lesson in the illusory difference between peacekeeping and war-making: Beirut 1983, the bombing of the marine barracks. The marines, too, had been advertised as peacekeepers. The locals did not buy the advertising.

Beirut is far more appropriate an example of humanitarian intervention than Somalia. Beirut, unlike Somalia, had well-armed, organised armies in pursuit of political goals, not just random thugs and thieves. Beirut was also devoid of strategic rationale.

Remember, U.S. troops went into Beirut twice. The first time, August 1982, there was a strategic rationale: to evacuate the Palestine Liberation Orga-

nisation and thus end the Lebanon war. After that success, the troops withdrew. Less than a month later they returned, this time moved by guilt and moral outrage over Sabra and Shatila. Moved by the pictures, Americans returned to peacekeeping. Sound familiar? This adventure ended with 241 dead marines.

What then will America do when ex-Yugoslavs start firing at U.S. peacekeepers, when they violate their signed agreements? If we Americans are really just peacekeepers, we will stand by and tut-tut. If we are serious about enforcing agreement then we will have to make war.

Then we have a simple choice. More men, more dead, until the job is done, as in — another analogy — Vietnam. Or withdrawal, as in Beirut (and, in the end, Vietnam too).

There is one more analogy worth recalling: Suez. In 1956, Britain and France seized the Suez Canal, which Nasser had nationalised. Eisenhower reacted sharply, and forced the British and French into a humiliating withdrawal. This split put enormous strain on the Atlantic alliance. It led to the resignation (and ruin) of the British prime minister. It helped to turn French foreign policy away from the United States for decades.

Bosnia, where the French and British view diverges deeply from Mr. Clinton's, has a similar potential. Mr. Clinton is trying to recapitulate Mr. Bush's Gulf war coalition. But Mr. Bush was able to line up Britain and France because they agreed on the need for military action in the Gulf.

In Bosnia, they don't. If Washington bullies them into war, there will be loud voices in Britain and France arguing that their blood and treasure are being expended to satisfy the Americans. But if they resist the pressures and the United States is forced to go it alone, loud voices in America will argue that the allies are unreliable, unwilling to share the burdens.

Even if we overcome our differences and go in together, think of what a long and costly NATO ground involvement in the Balkans will do to the alliance. A long and costly ground involvement in Southeast Asia nearly tore apart America. NATO is a far more fragile entity. It may turn out to be the ultimate casualty of the coming Bosnian war. — Washington Post.

Washington's ups and downs

IT IS probably only natural that the Palestinians have received the Israeli draft "framework agreement" on the Palestinian interim self-rule with considerable scepticism and reservations. After all, the Israelis and the Palestinians are in a long and hard negotiating process, and should be expected to treat each other's proposals with rejection and suspicion. The first Palestinian negative reaction to the latest Israeli proposal spelling out the Rabin government's notion of Palestinian self-rule came Saturday when Hanan Ashrawi, the Palestinian spokeswoman, said that her negotiating team received the Israeli ideas with "extreme displeasure." Ashrawi hastened later to qualify this early assessment by indicating that the Israeli formula would not be rejected. But Faisal Husseini, the chief Palestinian negotiator, was a bit more upbeat three days later when he conceded that the Israeli proposals contained "some good points, but not enough for us to accept as is."

Of course no one expected the Palestinians to endorse the Israeli draft in toto irrespective of its acknowledged merits simply because to do so would run counter to the art of negotiations. That is why the final Palestinian response after thorough deliberations by the PLO leadership in Tunis would take the form of a counter offer outlining the Palestinians conception of both the interim and final solution of their problem. When the dust settles in the wake of the exchange of offers between the two parties, there could be new opportunity to marry the conflicting ideas with a view to creating a balance between them.

In point of fact, the wording of the latest Israeli bargaining position offers possibilities upon which future agreements could be built. Paragraph one of the Israeli text stipulates that the envisaged just, lasting and comprehensive peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis will have to be based on U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. We believe that the reaffirmation of the applicability of these two resolutions especially with regard to the negotiations leading to the permanent status of the occupied Palestinian territories is encouraging. The fact that the two phases of negotiations, the one dealing with the interim solution and the other with the final phase, are viewed as interlocked is also a positive development.

Yet there are several serious shortcomings in the Israeli ideas that legitimately give rise to concern. The extent of the proposed Palestinian Executive Council's (PEC) control over the Palestinian territories has yet to be elucidated to the satisfaction of the Palestinian side. And top of many other problems with the proposal itself, there is still the deteriorating human rights situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Palestinians are rightfully concerned that the Israelis should stick to promises they explicitly and implicitly made but never delivered.

True, the wait-and-see atmosphere in Washington appears to have halted the initial momentum attained between the two parties at the beginning of the ninth round. But unless there is dramatic movement on several key fronts, the Palestinians could not really be blamed for lowering the level of their participation in what is left of this round.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

SAWT AL SHAAB daily Tuesday blamed the U.S. administration for the setback in the current peace negotiations in Washington for not playing the role it had promised at the outset of the ninth session. The optimism which prevailed at the beginning of the current session of Middle East peace negotiations has given way to pessimism and the peace process is now facing a dangerous setback, all because the U.S. administration continued to remain passive to Israel's intransigence, said the daily. This dramatic retreat in the negotiations was also caused by Israel's continued refusal to grant the Palestinians their rights and its rejection of swapping land for peace and a comprehensive settlements, said the paper. What Israel has offered during the talks in the ninth session was an old formula rephrased and reshaped from the previous plans and nothing new that would lure the Arab parties or reflect a positive stand on the part of the Israeli government, the paper continued. It is Israel's refusal to commit itself to a complete withdrawal from the Golan Heights, as requested by Syria, and its lack of commitment to U.N. Security Council resolutions, concerning the Palestinian and Lebanese territories, that have rendered the current session as futile as the previous rounds, the paper added. In his cable to President Bill Clinton Monday, His Majesty King Hussein made it clear that Jordan and the Arab parties were keen on peace which, he stressed, should be based on U.N. resolutions, the paper added. It said that with this, the King has placed the ball in the American court, reminding Washington of its pledge to help achieve peace.

A COLUMNIST in Al Dustour daily discussed the question of political parties in Jordan, noting that they have no popular base because they do not try to reach the masses, but only cater to the public. Taher Al Udwan said that a great deal has been written about the parties' formation and their leaders, but nothing has been said about the reason behind lack of desire on the part of the young people to join in. Indeed, these young people are busy searching for employment and have no time to join the parties which, the writer said, aim primarily to safeguard the party leaders' interests and prestige and enable them to reach Parliament. Only when the young people see that the rich heads of political parties have opened factories or income-generating projects which can employ them would they think about joining political parties or supporting them in the coming elections, said the writer.



Vietnam draws battle-lines on rights, democracy

By John Rogers
Reuters

HANOI — Vietnam's leaders, responding to the collapse of communism in Europe by liberalising the economy, have drawn their battle-lines for arguments with the West on human rights and multiparty democracy.

The stand now emerging from pronouncements by ministers and official organs places Vietnam in the camp of Third World states which encourage individual liberties, but not so far as they may threaten stability, seen as the overriding goal.

Stability, that is, under Communist Party leadership.

Hanoi has become increasingly vocal in defending this principle against overseas critics, indicating that no further relaxation of political controls already eased since the mid-1980s is in prospect.

In an unusually forceful editorial, the army newspaper Doi Nhan Dan said last week that communism was what the Vietnamese people wanted and the country's enemies would not be able to oust the party from power by imposing "Western values."

Claims by Western countries and "reactionary overseas Vietnamese" that Vietnam violated human rights were intended to create disorder and instability, the newspaper said.

"Democracy and human rights are themes that the Vietnamese services of foreign radios harp on to disparage us."

The country would not be able to defeat communism by appealing for a multiparty system and free elections on peaceful evolution, Quan Doi Nhan Dan said.

"They could not win by war," it said, referring to communist victories against France and the U.S.-backed Saigon regime. "Now they want to win through peaceful evolution? Well, they won't."

It was not clear what triggered

the comments, for Western countries have muted criticism of Vietnam since its human rights record improved in recent years and the rule of law was guaranteed in a 1992 constitution.

But the issue is sensitive as Vietnam seeks to implant a market economy, do more business with the West and restore relations with the United States.

Western leaders — including French President Francois Mitterrand and German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel this year — routinely raise the cases of the prisoners of concern to watchdog groups like Amnesty International.

But the West does not condemn Hanoi in the same terms used against Iraq, for example, or China since the 1989 Tiananmen Square killings in Peking.

The West gives Hanoi better reviews than it got in the late 1970s and 1980s, when hundreds of thousands of people associated with the defeated, U.S.-backed Saigon regime were herded into reeducation camps.

The camps are now closed, the government says it holds no political prisoners and officials publicly defend Hanoi's record.

Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam staked his case forcefully when Mr. Kinkel produced an amnesty list in April.

Mr. Cam said he told Mr. Kinkel "there should be a distinction between human rights and certain people's abuse of the law of the land to violate national security. We punish violators of the law in accordance with the law and I believe every country would do that... If anyone has any doubt, we will invite them to Vietnam to discuss (the issue) better."

After a rare visit in March by a rights watchdog, the Washington-based Asia Watch, the group reported its talks had opened a dialogue but "serious human rights concerns remain." Intending to visit again, it did not list its

concerns.

Western governments don't like the severity of some sentences handed down by the courts, or the way trials on charges of anti-government activities are conducted.

On March 31, the leader of eight dissidents was jailed by a people's court in Ho Chi Minh City for 20 years after a two-day trial on "activities aimed at overthrowing the government" by circulating a newsletter.

Diplomats in Hanoi saw the sentence as unduly harsh and as intended to discourage others. Asia Watch condemned the sentence as violating international rights standards.

But the protests stopped there.

Western diplomats and human rights workers here say there may be a few dozen Vietnamese who would be called political prisoners in the West but are behind bars for breaking Vietnamese laws. One puts the figure at 50 to 60.

"Isolating Vietnam would not do anything to get them freed," a diplomat said. "The current direction of economic freedom is the way to go. Eventually it will lead to democratisation."

While fuzzy, this formulation comes close to that voiced by the few government officials prepared to discuss the issue.

"Democratic liberties cannot be dissociated from a country's economic conditions," one said. "We don't believe there is a universal formula. The better the economic situation is, the further we'll go on the way to liberalisation."

Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet has also pinned his colours to the mast, drawing his own battle-line on the democracy issue.

Asked if this month's elections in Cambodia put pressure on Vietnam to hold elections of its own, he told a foreign interviewer: "The question is stability, not multiparty or one-party elections."



French premier unveils austerity plan to revive battered economy

PARIS (AP) — Struggling to cut government red ink and stimulate the economy, the conservative government Monday announced a budget of stiff tax increases while continuing funding for jobs programmes.

A communist labour union, meanwhile, threatened mass strikes against Prime Minister Edouard Balladur's programme that aims to trim a deficit that could double to more than 330 billion francs (\$60 billion) this year.

Though polls show the new prime minister highly popular after six weeks in office, the plan breaks campaign pledges not to hike social security taxes and is likely to be his first major challenge.

The budget, unveiled after a cabinet meeting, is expected to be approved by Mr. Balladur's allies who hold an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly.

It includes a 16 per cent increase in the tax on liquor and a rise in the gasoline tax by 33 centimes per litre — giving France the highest gasoline tax in Europe.

Mr. Balladur will double social security taxes — paid by workers, retirees and the jobless — that cover medical care, pensions and

aid to families.

The effect of these taxes means that a worker earning 10,000 francs (\$1,851) monthly will see his annual tax bill climb by 3,400 francs (\$630).

Government ministers will also have to bite the bullet: In addition to cuts in perks, their salaries that average 600,000 francs (\$110,000) will be cut 10 per cent.

Mr. Balladur is betting his cuts in business taxes and funding for jobs and housing will stimulate the economy.

Mr. Balladur told a news conference the budget "lays the first building blocks for a durable recovery" and he appealed for "the will of all: the government, the administration, businesses and employees must be concentrated on the objective."

For all the tax increases, the budget will only brake the rise in the deficit, trimming a projected 333 billion-franc (\$61.6 billion) shortfall to 317 billion francs (\$58.7 billion).

The budget plan is part of a five-year blueprint to trim the deficit from about 4.5 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) this year to 2.5 per cent in 1997.

Members of the 12-nation European Community must have a government deficit less than three per cent of GNP to join in a

single currency, one of the provisions of the Maastricht treaty on closer unity.

The General Confederation of Labour Union, which is strongest in the transport sectors, voiced its displeasure with the budget and called for a day of strikes and protests against the plan May 27.

"This is a path toward the abyss," said Louis Vianet, the union's secretary general. "It's workers, retirees and the unemployed who are going to pay for most of this."

The Socialist Party, routed in March elections after governing for 10 of the past 12 years, said the budget "will brutally brake consumption and growth, meaning a considerable aggravation in unemployment," currently at 10.7 per cent.

Mr. Balladur has spent a month preparing France for sacrifices to bail out an economy he diagnoses as the worst off since World War II — far worse than the Socialists had said while they were in power.

Mr. Balladur will raise unemployment insurance taxes, lower hospital reimbursement, and require workers put in 40 years instead of the current 37.5 to receive full state-paid pensions.

The public is waiting for him to make good on promising to reduce the soaring unemployment, which topped three million people for this year for the first time since World War II.

Mr. Balladur will direct 22 billion francs (\$4.1 billion) to part-time jobs for youths, bailing out the bankrupt unemployment insurance programme, and easing family-leave payments by business.

He also plans to stimulate the depressed housing industry with 5.5 billion francs (\$1 billion) in tax relief to property owners and loans to low-income buyers.

The budget earmarks an additional 1.3 billion francs (\$240 million) for environmental projects including waste cleanup, water purification and installing high-tension lines underground.

Put your house in order, economist tells Africa

ADDIS ABABA (R) — A senior U.N. official has said that rich countries would not invest in Africa as long as it was plagued with conflicts such as that in Somalia.

"I don't think Africa is learning anything from what is taking place in Somalia," Layashi Yaker, executive secretary of the U.N.'s Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) told a news conference.

"Look at the havoc and self-destruction being caused to the riches of Angola, Zaire, Liberia and Rwanda through internal conflict," he said.

Angola and Zaire are two of the potentially richest countries in the world's poorest continent but living standards have slid ever backwards because of war.

He said it was "most tragic" that the U.N. was spending close to \$3 billion a year to keep the peace in Somalia and ensure minimal food supplies because of strife among its six million people.

Mr. Yaker, speaking after a five-day meeting of African economy ministers, called on the industrialised world to stop "marginalising" Africa by channelling the same scale of aid former communist states in eastern Europe now receive.

"Either the world handles Africa the right way, allocating massive assistance to help exploit its rich potential or there will be no global security, no common fate and no sustainable development in the whole world," he said.

World peace, he said, depended upon prosperity in the poorest parts of the world, and he called on Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states, the world's richest 24 countries, to invest in Africa.

"The rest of the world cannot enjoy peace while the per capita income of the OECD states hits an all time high of \$25,000 and that of Africa south of the Sahara

stagnates at \$300," Yaker said.

He urged African governments to stop wasting money on arms to attract western investment to spur growth.

"African states need massive investment to accelerate their economies but investment is not forthcoming because African states are unable to create the right situation for investment. "African states must reduce or even totally end military expenditures, stop internal conflicts and restore security and stability in their respective countries and regions," he said.

The meeting endorsed a call for \$950 billion in aid in the 1990s for Africa to break from the poverty trap.

The Addis Ababa-based ECA, set up to promote and study African economic growth, said that \$490 billion would be needed to pay off debts arising from years of economic mismanagement and low world prices for basic commodity exports.

Sudan cuts taxes to reduce food costs

KHARTOUM (R) — Sudan's military government has cut taxes on cereals in an effort to bring down food prices.

Most Sudanese, harried by skyrocketing commodity prices, welcomed the new measure, intended to soften the impact of a transition to a free market economy.

Head of state Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Al Bashir reduced taxes on cereals from 16 to eight per cent last week. Excise duty was cut to two per cent from five per cent and local duties on crops cancelled.

Despite large harvests in the last few years, helped by good rains and expanded cultivation, commodity prices have remained so high that imports are sometimes cheaper.

Production of dura or sorghum, Sudan's staple food, increased from about 900,000 tonnes in 1989 to 3.7 million tonnes last year. Fruits, vegetables and eggs are also plentiful in the markets, but too expensive for many families.

A 100-kilogramme sack of dura now costs about 1,500 pounds (more than \$10) while a 50-kilogramme sack of beans costs over 2,000 pounds. Minimum pay in Sudan is 2,500 pounds (\$18) a month.

The government ended subsidies and decontrolled prices in February 1992 in a major move to turn Sudan's largely state-run economy into a market economy.

But better harvests have not had the expected effect of pushing prices down.

The ministry of agriculture estimates that the farm sector grew 31.5 per cent last year compared to 8.5 per cent in the industrial sector. The whole economy is said to have grown 11.3 per cent.

A report released recently by the ministry said prices were high because imported goods used in production like pesticides, fertilisers and petroleum products, drive up costs.

The report said cotton growers — who produce Sudan's chief source of foreign currency — have to spend 43 per cent of the value of their crops on imports needed for their fields.

Oman and UAE form joint investment company

DUBAI (R) — The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman have signed an agreement forming a joint investment company with 30 million Omani riyals (\$76 million) in capital, the Omani News Agency said. It said each state would have a 30 per cent stake in the Oman-Emirates Investment Company. The remaining 40 per cent would be offered to the public in the two countries.

The agency said shares would be offered in October and the company would start operating early in 1994. The agency added the new company would invest in the two neighbouring countries in different sectors including agriculture, industry, commerce, minerals and tourism.

Hong Kong bolsters trade relations with Jordan

AMMAN — To further bolster Jordanian-Hong Kong trade relations, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council held a trade exhibition at Amra Hotel in Amman on May 6 and 7, 1993.

At the same time a Hong Kong trade delegation visited Jordan and concluded with local businessmen a number of trade deals worth \$542,000.

Contracts are underway for further deals worth at least \$1.42 million.

Jordanian-Hong Kong trade links have lately witnessed noticeable progress.

Japan overseas investment slumps

TOKYO (R) — Japanese direct overseas investments dropped sharply in fiscal 1992 for the third year in a row, reflecting the domestic economic slowdown, the financial daily Nihon Keizai Shimbun said Sunday.

The figure plunged by 28.3 per cent to \$17.2 billion in the year ended March 31, 1993, on an international balance-of-payments basis. That is barely one-third of the record \$49.1 billion in fiscal 1989, the newspaper said.

The steep fall could have worrying repercussions for Japan's politically explosive trade surplus with the rest of the world, it added.

The Bank of Japan says more overseas should be moved overseas to help reduce the trade imbalances. This could also smooth Japanese manufacturers' efforts to cope with a rapid rise in the yen's value against the U.S. dollar, it says.

The financial daily attributed the steep fall in direct overseas investment to fewer surplus funds available to companies in the current slowdown and to increased repatriation of funds which the firms had invested in overseas real estate.

It said the government and the private sector were likely to step up joint efforts to promote direct overseas investment.

Japan's current account surplus yawned to a record \$176.2 billion in the financial year ending on March 31, the finance ministry announced Thursday.

The trade surplus rose to \$136.1 billion in the same year from a previous high of \$113.7 billion in 1991/92.

Japanese officials say the surplus has soared because the domestic slowdown has dampened demand for imports and the yen's rise against the dollar has magnified this trend by increasing the value of exports.

ADB: Asian cities face environmental crisis

MANILA (R) — Asia's teeming cities, set to house half the world's urban population by the year 2020, face severe environmental degradation and pollution from rapid urbanisation, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said.

The Manila-based bank said contaminated water, congestion, pollution, malnutrition, overcrowding and high crime rates were worsening in Asia's burgeoning cities without drastic action.

"A major challenge is to ensure that urbanisation is environmentally sustainable," the ADB said in a report.

"The expansion of metropolitan areas in the region, including the emergence of 'mega-cities,' can lead to unprecedented levels of pollution and environmental degradation unless appropriate measures are taken."

By the year 2020, the urban population in Asia's development countries is expected to balloon to more than two billion people from 849 million in 1990.

In 1990, there were only 19 cities in the region with a population of more than one million.

At least 12 of the world's 21 megacities, those with more than 10 million people, will be in Asia by the end of the century.

Bombay, Shanghai and Calcutta will each have more than 15 million residents and the populations of nine other cities will exceed 10 million, the bank said.

Although rapid economic growth in Asia has improved the quality of life for many people, ADB President Kimimasa Tsurumizu said in the bank's Development Outlook that poverty, population growth and urbanisation remained pressing problems.

There are dozens of Asian cities evolving into major metropolitan areas with populations of more than three million people. Most are growing rapidly.

Problems range from paying for clean water in Indonesia, to housing squatters in Manila, to improving winter air quality in China where factories and homes burn polluting coal.

"Both natural population growth and rural-urban migration

have contributed to the rapid growth in urban populations in the Asia-Pacific region," the ADB explained.

While explosive urban growth has helped spur Asian economic development, "most large cities in the region face environmental problems arising from poorly-managed urban development and activities."

The bank must work closely with developing countries to raise the productivity and efficiency of urban economies to deliver basic infrastructure and services, especially water supply and transport, it said. This will require massive investment.

"Simply addressing the management of physical resources will not lead to a desirable pattern of development unless adequate attention is paid to price adjustments to encourage environment-friendly behaviour," it warned.

In future, the ADB will require countries to put greater emphasis on strategic planning to guide the allocation of resources in their cities.

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Diana's stepmother to remarry

LONDON (AP) — Princess Diana's stepmother Raine Spencer, widowed slightly over a year ago, announced Monday that she will marry a French businessman this summer. "It was love at first sight," the 63-year-old Dowager Countess Spencer said as she and her fiancé Count Jean-François De Chambrun posed for photographers outside the Connaught Hotel. Count De Chambrun, 55, called the his fiancée his "fairy queen" and said, "I was entranced by her aura." The couple met at a dinner party in Monaco 33 days ago and plan to marry in London in July. Princess Diana's father, the 8th Earl Spencer, married Raine Legge in 1976, after divorcing Diana's mother. The earl died on March 29, 1992, after a heart attack, and his son Charles became the 9th earl and inherited Althorp, the family estate.

Motorcyclist jumps Great Wall

PEKING (AP) — British stunt man Eddie Kidd jumped over the Great Wall of China on a motorcycle Tuesday before several thousand spectators. "Maybe I'm going to go and jump a pyramid," Mr. Kidd, 33, said after the jump. Mr. Kidd had said he would make the jump with only one hand on the handlebars, but television footage showed he used both hands. A Hong Kong stunt man jumped over the Great Wall last year, but the Simatai section of the wall that Mr. Kidd jumped was more difficult. The wall itself was only about 20 feet (6 metres) high but was located on a steep mountain slope that continued to rise behind it. Mr. Kidd rode down a takeoff ramp and soared about 10 metres in the air to cross the wall, clearing it with about 3 to 4 metres to spare. Then he landed hard on a second ramp and crashed into a barrier of boxes stacked at the end. If he had broken through the boxes, Mr. Kidd would have fallen about 12 metres down a cliff. He scrambled back up the landing ramp, waved to spectators and popped open a bottle of champagne. Mr. Kidd, who performed stunts in James Bond movies, has performed 12,000 jumps without breaking a single bone. On Sunday, he jumped over 10 buses in a Peking stadium, breaking the world record of eight buses that he set last July.

Man crosses Atlantic in bathtub-sized boat

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — A 50-year-old Briton completed an Atlantic crossing in a bathtub-sized sailboat 7 1/2 inches (19 cm) shorter than he is tall. Tom McNally of Liverpool, England, docked in San Juan's harbour, his first port of call since leaving the Portuguese island of Madeira, off the African coast, on Feb. 13. "No one believed you could navigate such a small, round boat," he told the AP. "I made it to my planned destination. I'm quite proud of that." McNally said his voyage sets records for the smallest vessel used in an ocean crossing, and the first crossing in a vessel smaller than its occupant. McNally is 6 feet (1.83 metres) tall. The boat, which resembles an amusement park bumper car with a clear bubble top and a sail, is five feet, four and a half inches (1.64 metres) long.

Clinton outbid in puppy auction

WASHINGTON (APF) — Socks the cat may not be the only White House pet for much longer, although he has won at least a short reprieve after President Bill Clinton was outbid for a puppy in a charity auction. Mr. Clinton went up to \$3,500 as the price of the golden retriever pup rose at a charity auction at his daughter Chelsea's school Saturday, but refused to go any higher, and the dog was finally sold for \$3,700. White House spokeswoman Dee Dee Myers said Monday that this might not be the end of the affair for the 13-year-old Chelsea. "It's possible that Chelsea could be ready for a new dog," she said. The Clintons had a dog several years ago but it died after being hit by a car.

Man shoots his cat and accidentally shoots himself

STOCKHOLM (AP) — Police said Monday they believed a man found dead in his home accidentally shot himself after deliberately shooting his cat, the Swedish News Agency (TT) reported. The accident occurred Sunday in an isolated farm outside Varnamo in southern Sweden. The report quoted unidentified police as saying the 50-year-old man apparently first killed his cat with a shotgun and inadvertently fired a second shot against himself. The man's identity was withheld in line with Swedish custom.



Supporters of the ruling Colorado Party celebrate at the party headquarters as early election results show certain victory to their candidate (AFP photo)

Ruling party candidate leads in Paraguay

ASUNCION, Paraguay (AP) — For better or worse, Paraguay seems unlikely to change much with businessman Juan Carlos Wasmosy as president, the first civilian president in nearly 40 years. The Colorado Party that has controlled the government since 1947 still will dominate both houses of Congress. And the armed forces may remain a private reserve — even with its first civilian commander-in-chief in decades. Both institutions were mainstays of the 1954-89 dictatorship of Gen. Alfredo Stroessner and his successor, Gen. Andres Rodriguez, who toppled Gen. Stroessner four years ago and then was elected to complete his term of office.

Mr. Wasmosy, the Colorado candidate, was the leading vote-getter in national elections Sunday. The tally won't be final for days, but official and private counts all indicate he outpaced his nearest rival by nearly 10 percentage points. The official Central electoral Board credited Mr. Wasmosy with 142,700 votes, or 39.5 per cent of the 361,521 tabulated as of late Monday. The compares to 109,102, or 30.2 per cent, for Domingo Laino of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party; and 97,131, or 26.9 per cent, for Guillermo Caballero Vargas of the Coalition National Encounter.

Mr. Wasmosy spoke Monday with reporters, responding vaguely to questions about whether he would attempt to break the military-Colorado connection. "I have a little confidence in us," he said. "Let us do the job." As to whether his government would make a priority of prosecuting officers accused of human rights violations during the Stroessner regime, he said, "it's time to turn the page" on the past and look instead to the future. The election nevertheless was a turning point. When Gen. Rodriguez puts the oath of office on Mr. Wasmosy next Aug. 15, it will be the first time in Paraguay's history that one elected president hands power to another.

That is "truly a historic event in the evolution of Paraguay," said former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, an official election observer. He called the elections "free and fair and democratic and successful," despite numerous irregularities. Another observer, Secretary-General Jose Baena Soares of the Organisation of American States, acknowledged the election was flawed, but said the flaws were not systematic, did not affect the outcome and perhaps were only to be expected. "We all know you don't get instant democracy. It's not like coffee," Mr. Baena Soares said.

U.S., N. Korean diplomats hold further talks on nuclear issue

PEKING (Agencies) — U.S. and North Korean embassy officials met again in Peking to discuss the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, the U.S. embassy confirmed Tuesday. The embassy released a State Department said the meeting took place Monday at North Korea's request, but disclosed no details of what was said. It was the 33rd such meeting between the two countries' political counselors since they began contacts in early 1989. The meetings have become more frequent since North Korea refused to let the International Atomic Energy Agency inspect two alleged military nuclear sites and announced it was pulling out of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The decision led to international concern that North Korea is developing nuclear weapons. North Korea denies it but says the matter can only be resolved in high-level talks between it and Washington. The State Department statement said no high-level meeting has yet been scheduled. Meanwhile New Zealand Prime Minister Jim Bolger said Tuesday he would seek Chinese help in persuading North Korea to come clean about its military nuclear potential. Mr. Bolger told a news conference in Seoul he would take up the question of North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its refusal to allow international inspections when he visits Peking this week.

ANC: Whites plot to kill leaders

JOHANNESBURG (Agencies) — The African National Congress (ANC) said Tuesday white rightwingers were plotting to assassinate its leaders and derail democracy talks aimed at ending white minority rule in South Africa. It said one of the conspirators had confessed to police last week he had been involved in a plot to kill Communist Party Chairman Joe Slovo, who is also a top white figure in the ANC. The movement accused the police of not informing Mr. Slovo even though they knew of the plot. Police earlier said they believed there had been a conspiracy to kill Mr. Slovo's Communist Party colleague Chris Hani, who was assassinated on April 10. "The information reinforces our view that these assassinations are part of a broader conspiracy by forces determined to destabilise the negotiation process," the ANC said. Polish immigrant Janusz Walus and two leading rightwing politicians, Clive Derby-Lewis and his wife Gaye, will appear in court Wednesday accused by police of murdering Mr. Hani. Johannesburg's Star newspaper reported Tuesday it had uncovered a plot to kill Mr. Slovo involving three rightwing South Africans and a Hungarian immigrant. Mr. Slovo, 67, whose wife was killed by a letter bomb in Mozambique in 1982, said pro-apartheid groups were desperate to derail democracy talks because negotiators were on the verge of reaching agreements on transition to democracy. "I am certain there are more plotters than meets the eye. There is a sense of desperation within the rightwing movement. This desperation is borne out by the fact that the negotiation process is bearing fruit," Mr. Slovo said. ANC leader Nelson Mandela called on the government on Tuesday to take action against the rightwing threat. "We must take the threat from the rightwing very seriously because they are firmly entrenched in government structures," Mr. Mandela said on his return from Britain, Germany and Switzerland. Meanwhile, President F.W. de Klerk said Tuesday South Africa's democracy negotiators were making progress and a government of national unity could be in place by next year. "We know that the only way to address violence is to move ahead rapidly with negotiations," he said in an opening address to a major tourism exhibition in Durban. "We are making heartening progress in this regard and look forward to the early establishment of the transitional executive councils which will help to prepare the way for our first truly national elections and the installation next year of a government of national unity," he said. He said tourism could contribute to the development of South Africa and to improving the lives of millions of South Africans. It was the second upbeat statement in two days from the man who started to dismantle apartheid three years ago. He told a conference in Pretoria Monday South Africa was on the verge of a breakthrough in its transition to democracy. "I believe that our vision of a just, stable and prosperous South Africa will soon become a reality. We are on the brink of a breakthrough," he said. In a separate development, Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans said Commonwealth nations including Australia are set to lift remaining sanctions against South Africa. Mr. Evans told the Senate Tuesday he was in active consultation with his Commonwealth colleagues on the matter.

Danes vote to revive or bury Maastricht on May 18

COPENHAGEN (R) — Danes vote on May 18 in a crucial referendum on the European Community (EC) Maastricht Treaty — and polls show voters are more likely to revive than bury the union pact. But the surveys show a big "yes" lead has tended to narrow in recent months ahead of the vote on the treaty on political, economic and monetary union and a deal granting Denmark exemptions from key goals. Danes voted a shock "no" to Maastricht last June. Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, predicting a clear "yes" to set the EC back on track after a year of turmoil, says the vote is Denmark's most important foreign policy choice since it agreed to join NATO after World War II. "Quite clearly, a 'yes' will secure the stability we need in Europe," Mr. Rasmussen told Reuters, saying Danish ratification would help promote economic growth throughout the EC and allow more efforts to curb high unemployment. Anti-Maastricht campaigners all over Europe say the vote is the last chance for ordinary citizens to kill off a plan they say was dreamt up by a misguided elite of EC bureaucrats and politicians. Maastricht needs the signatures of all 12 states to come into force. Britain has said it will not ratify Maastricht if Danes again vote "no" on May 18. All other EC states except Germany have ratified. "After the iron curtain came down, the last thing we need is to create an armed superpower in Europe with common boundaries towards Eastern Europe," said Jens-Peter Bonde, a leader of the anti-Maastricht June Movement formed after last year's "no". A Gallup poll Tuesday in the daily Berlingske Tidende showed 48 per cent of Danes would vote "yes", 33 per cent "no" and that the other 19 per cent were undecided or would not vote. The lead broke a slide in support in recent days — a 46-33 per cent split Sunday sent shivers through financial markets. Jittery markets have yet to be convinced of a "yes". Overall, the "yes" lead has shrunk from an overwhelming 54 to 25 per cent margin in February. Most economists say a "no" could lead to quick devaluation of the Danish crown, cut economic growth, force interest rates up and undermine the EC's system of linked currencies. After the "no" last June, by a 50.7-49.3 per cent margin, Denmark won exemptions from Maastricht aims at an EC summit in December — including a common currency, joint defence policies, supranational police controls and joint citizenship. Danes have been bombarded with radio, newspaper and television campaigning. But many analysts say voters seem tired of hearing about Maastricht. Posters going up in recent days try to woo the doubters — ranging from a picture of a peaceful landscape and the slogan "yes, for Denmark's sake" by the ruling Social Democrats to the June Movement's "Give democracy a hand: Vote 'no'". Mr. Bonde said that, by accepting Maastricht, Denmark's 5.1 million people would lose their sovereignty and democratic control in a union dominated by big EC states like Germany and France. Foreign Minister Niels Helveg Petersen rejected the charges: "Voting 'yes' does not endanger our national identity or our wish to be Danes...it is a phenomenon of our daily lives that we are international." But the Danish "no" last June halted the EC's dreams that Maastricht could quickly crown a shift from the rivalries which triggered two world wars this century. Before the shock "no", the EC's drive towards union had contrasted sharply with the fracturing of the Soviet Bloc and the bloody warring in former Yugoslavia.

Violence is not severe enough to stop Cambodian elections — Akashi

PHNOM PENH (Agencies) — Yasushi Akashi, the United Nations peacekeeping chief in Cambodia, Tuesday said widespread acts of violence were not so severe as to force postponement of elections due in less than two weeks. "I regret to report that figures now available for the month of April confirm that there was widespread political and related violence throughout Cambodia last month, Mr. Akashi, head of the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), told a working session of the all-faction Supreme National Council. He blamed the militant Khmer Rouge guerrilla faction for the lion's share of the violence, which has mainly been directed against the unarmed civilian population. "We have reports of 44 separate attacks by the NADK (National Army of Democratic Kampuchea) on civilian targets, which have resulted in 62 deaths, 137 injuries and 31 abductions," Mr. Akashi said. "These elections will clearly not take place in the neutral political environment, as envisaged," he said. Nonetheless, Mr. Akashi told the meeting, the elections would go ahead despite the violence. He spoke after unprecedented violence directed against U.N. personnel by the Khmer Rouge, who have vowed to use force to stop the poll. The guerrillas have recently launched a spate of commando-style hit-and-run attacks against U.N. positions in northwestern, central, southern and eastern provinces. In one of the worst attacks, a 300-strong Khmer Rouge force rampaged into the centre of the town of Siem Reap on May 3, causing at least nine deaths and 21 injuries. On the following day, a joint U.N. military and police patrol in a guerrilla-occupied zone in Ampil district was ambushed by the Khmer Rouge. Meanwhile, the leader of one of the three main political parties indicated Tuesday that his party may withdraw if widespread violence continues. "How can we participate in the election if there is no neutral political environment?" Son Sann asked the Associated Press. Mr. Son Sann, 81, leads the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party, one of the country's four main political factions. It was formed from an anti-Communist resistance group that battled the Vietnamese-installed Phnom Penh government from 1979 until a 1991 peace accord. Mr. Son Sann Tuesday issued several statements supporting the Khmer Rouge's arguments, one of which is that the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia has failed to create a safe political environment for elections. "Cambodia is in complete insecurity and is evolving toward a new process of warfare," he said. "We have no conviction that UNTAC would be able to miraculously restore a neutral political environment for free and fair elections." Mr. Son Sann founded Cambodia's National Bank, was premier briefly under Prince Norodom Sihanouk, and left a comfortable exile in Paris late in life to lead the Khmer Peoples National Liberation Front. Two other main parties, those of the Phnom Penh government and the party led by the son of Prince Sihanouk, have said the election should go ahead as planned.

Large U.S. majority supports humanitarian intervention

WASHINGTON (APF) — Sizeable majorities of Americans support U.S. military intervention for humanitarian aims but prefer diplomacy for coping with upheavals, an opinion survey indicated. Adults questioned by the bipartisan Americans Talk Issues Foundation also want other countries and the United Nations to shoulder more global responsibilities. They favour a slow approach toward deeper U.S. military cuts. In the nationwide telephone poll conducted in late March and early April, 39 per cent approved of what the United Nations and United States had done for Bosnia. But 45 per cent said more was needed and 8 per cent said outside intervention had gone too far. On coping with upheavals, "diplomatic initiatives to negotiate peace" were regarded as "very preferable," by 67 per cent of those questioned. "Use enough military intervention to deliver food and other supplies" was also very preferable, for 62 per cent, but "use of military intervention with overwhelming force to defeat the primary aggressors" was highly preferred by only 19 per cent. Other alternatives for handling wars, with percentages of those highly preferring them: Prohibit arms sales to warring parties, 64 per cent; military intervention with enough force to arrest leaders of warring factions and try them before a world criminal court, 45 per cent; trade embargoes, 44; airline service cutoffs, 28; monetary embargo, 26 and international telephone cutoff, 13. On Somalia, 57 per cent approved U.S. and U.N. performance in stopping interference with relief. Thirty per cent said more should have been done, 10 per cent favoured less. On Iraq, 36 per cent approved U.S. and U.N. performance, 50 per cent said there was not enough intervention and 10 per cent too much. An overwhelming 87 per cent answered "yes" to a question that named Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and asked if the United Nations should have authority to arrest individuals who commit international crimes. The poll indicated that Americans consider "the U.N. a critical contact for action abroad." Stanley Greenberg, pollster to President Bill Clinton and the Democratic National Committee, told reporters at a news conference releasing the poll. His firm, Greenberg Research, was a leading participant in the survey. David Hansen, research director of market strategies and pollster for the 1991 Bush-Quayle campaign, also participated. The survey questioned 1,020 people for as long as 35 minutes each, offering a choice of responses much longer than the typical media or interest-group poll, said ATIF President Alan F. Kay. The margin for error was plus or minus 3.1 per cent. To one question, 65 per cent agreed that "things in the world are pretty seriously off on the wrong track" and only 28 per cent said "moving in the right direction." This compared with 46 per cent "right" and 43 per cent "wrong," registered in a November, 1991, poll as the cold war ended. Fifty-six per cent said they agreed more with the statement that the United States "should not rush major cuts in defence spending just because the cold war is over." The alternative was a statement that the cold war's end offered a "unique opportunity" to cut military spending and rebuild the U.S. economy.

Thai factory fire toll hits 210

BANGKOK (Agencies) — The death toll from the fire that gutted a Bangkok toy factory rose to 210 shortly before dark Tuesday as workers pulled body after body from the smouldering ruins, officials said. Many women and some children were among the dead, said Interior Ministry officials who expected the toll to go higher. At least 547 people were also injured in the inferno, one of the worst disasters in recent Thai history and the world's second worst fire tragedy of the past 25 years. Witnesses told reporters that they had seen trapped workers too frightened to jump from upper floor windows screaming and waving for help. The blaze, which erupted Monday, razed all four buildings of the doll factory on the western fringe of the Thai capital, the officials said. Survivors told the Nation newspaper that the factory crumbled like "a house of cards" and that most workers who died had no chance to escape because there was no fire alarm to warn them. Chalermphol Prathiparanch, deputy governor of Nakhon Prathom province in which the factory was located, confirmed to AFP that the fire alarm did not work. Assistant Police Chief Chalern Rojanapradit told the English-language Nation that his initial investigation showed the factory buildings were "obviously substandard." Authorities were interrogating plant officials late Tuesday but no arrests had been made. The factory was run by Kader Industrial, a subsidiary of Hong Kong's Kader Holdings. A Kader spokesman said in Hong Kong that an electrical fault was the suspected cause. The company had sent its condolences to the families but said the tragedy would have "no substantial impact" on its overall group holdings. The fire ravaged the complex Monday afternoon while shifts were changing and some 4,000 employees were in the buildings. Rescue workers said most employees fled safely but more than 200 were believed still inside when the buildings collapsed, and the death toll likely would continue to rise. Earlier a local television report said there were more than 110 women among the bodies that had been recovered. Hundreds of rescue workers who had worked frantically throughout the night continued to claw through the rubble Tuesday. They were joined late morning Tuesday by soldiers equipped with cranes. Many of the bodies found were on the ground floor of the front building near a staircase, indicating the victims were trying to flee when trapped by the inferno, officials said. A factory employee said on radio Monday night that the fire was believed to have started in a ground floor storeroom of the main building when an electrical short circuit ignited nylon fabric and other synthetic materials. The blaze quickly spread to the floors above. Cloth cutters were working in the area where the fire started, which was at the front of the four-building complex, employees said. It began shortly after 4 p.m. Monday (0900 GMT) and took about six hours to bring under control. News reports said Bangkok's horrendous traffic delayed fire units in reaching the fire and also slowed the evacuation of victims. Thick black smoke billowed high into the sky as orange flames engulfed the buildings. Dozens of fire engines poured water on the inferno well into the night before bringing it under control. Witnesses said many of the injured were hurt when they jumped out of upper floors of the main four-storey building. "I and others who were fortunate enough to have escaped watched the building from the outside and saw section after section fall down," Thawee Saenudang, 37, told reporters. "I saw some workers jump from the second, third and fourth floors, while those who were too afraid to jump were screaming and waving for help," she said.

Yeltsin sacks top conservatives

MOSCOW (R) — President Boris Yeltsin axed his powerful security chief and another top conservative Tuesday in the first sign of a promised campaign to purge opponents of fast-track reform. Yuri Skokov, head of the Security Council, and Deputy Prime Minister Georgy Khizha were sacked after gravitating to the conservative camp in his bitter power struggle with the Kremlin leader. Terse presidential decrees announced they were being relieved of their duties and "transferred to other jobs", the standard euphemism for dismissal. The two men were the first casualties of Mr. Yeltsin's threatened drive to sweep away officials he says are slowing down or blocking reform at all levels of power. Their sacking marked the president's toughest move since winning an April 25 referendum on his presidency and radical policies and claiming what he sees as a fresh popular mandate for reform. It also set an example for regional leaders across the country, whom Mr. Yeltsin has ordered to shake up their local administrations and purge officials resistant to change. "Those who do not share our aims should simply leave so as not to interfere with our work," the president said last week. The timing of Mr. Yeltsin's move showed his confidence and determination to capitalise on the referendum, which showed 58.7 per cent backing for his rule and 53 per cent support for his tough free-market economic reforms. Mr. Yeltsin has pledged to use this mandate to push through a new constitution overhauling the political system and enhancing his presidential powers at the expense of the conservative legislature. Mr. Yeltsin, who has presented his draft version to leaders of Russia's 88 regions and ethnic republics, planned to meet regional representatives later Tuesday for more talks. But his strategy of bypassing Congress has angered conservatives, who look set to continue the power struggle as fiercely as ever despite the referendum. The exit of Mr. Skokov and Mr. Khizha will be welcomed by younger, radical ministers. But Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin struck a protectionist note by saying Russia should import less foreign technology and concentrate on producing more of its own. Russian news agency (RIA) quoted him as saying during a visit to the Caucasus that Russian companies were capable of producing many types of goods and equipment that were now being bought abroad. "If we don't set up a barrier to technology purchases from abroad, we will never survive," he was reported as saying. It was not immediately clear if he was recommending tariff barriers or an outright ban. Agencies quoted Mr. Chernomyrdin as saying Russia was not a "beggar" and should resist attempts to reduce it to a mere exporter of raw materials. He implicitly criticised the West, saying its credits were offered only in exchange for Russian mineral wealth to ship abroad. A separate Yeltsin order put Mr. Chernomyrdin in charge of a top-level enquiry into May Day clashes between Communist and nationalist demonstrators and the police. A policeman was fatally wounded and 600 people injured in rioting, the first time since an abortive 1991 Soviet coup that political tension had boiled over into street violence. The departure of Mr. Skokov and Mr. Khizha had been widely expected, particularly after weekend remarks by Mr. Yeltsin's chief of staff describing Mr. Skokov as opposed to the president on many issues. The secretive Skokov, who virtually never appears in public, was responsible for the armed forces, the Security Ministry (former KGB) and the Interior Ministry which runs the police. He effectively broke with the president in March. When Mr. Yeltsin went on television to announce he was assuming "special powers" to break the political impasse, Mr. Skokov attacked the move and effectively placed himself in opposition. Mr. Khizha was one of three men brought into government in May 1992 in what was widely seen as an attempt to balance between Acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar's radical team with more moderate figures associated with the industrial lobby.

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WASHINGTON (APF) — Sizeable majorities of Americans support U.S. military intervention for humanitarian aims but prefer diplomacy for coping with upheavals, an opinion survey indicated. Adults questioned by the bipartisan Americans Talk Issues Foundation also want other countries and the United Nations to shoulder more global responsibilities. They favour a slow approach toward deeper U.S. military cuts. In the nationwide telephone poll conducted in late March and early April, 39 per cent approved of what the United Nations and United States had done for Bosnia. But 45 per cent said more was needed and 8 per cent said outside intervention had gone too far. On coping with upheavals, "diplomatic initiatives to negotiate peace" were regarded as "very preferable," by 67 per cent of those questioned. "Use enough military intervention to deliver food and other supplies" was also very preferable, for 62 per cent, but "use of military intervention with overwhelming force to defeat the primary aggressors" was highly preferred by only 19 per cent. Other alternatives for handling wars, with percentages of those highly preferring them: Prohibit arms sales to warring parties, 64 per cent; military intervention with enough force to arrest leaders of warring factions and try them before a world criminal court, 45 per cent; trade embargoes, 44; airline service cutoffs, 28; monetary embargo, 26 and international telephone cutoff, 13. On Somalia, 57 per cent approved U.S. and U.N. performance in stopping interference with relief. Thirty per cent said more should have been done, 10 per cent favoured less. On Iraq, 36 per cent approved U.S. and U.N. performance, 50 per cent said there was not enough intervention and 10 per cent too much. An overwhelming 87 per cent answered "yes" to a question that named Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and asked if the United Nations should have authority to arrest individuals who commit international crimes. The poll indicated that Americans consider "the U.N. a critical contact for action abroad." Stanley Greenberg, pollster to President Bill Clinton and the Democratic National Committee, told reporters at a news conference releasing the poll. His firm, Greenberg Research, was a leading participant in the survey. David Hansen, research director of market strategies and pollster for the 1991 Bush-Quayle campaign, also participated. The survey questioned 1,020 people for as long as 35 minutes each, offering a choice of responses much longer than the typical media or interest-group poll, said ATIF President Alan F. Kay. The margin for error was plus or minus 3.1 per cent. To one question, 65 per cent agreed that "things in the world are pretty seriously off on the wrong track" and only 28 per cent said "moving in the right direction." This compared with 46 per cent "right" and 43 per cent "wrong," registered in a November, 1991, poll as the cold war ended. Fifty-six per cent said they agreed more with the statement that the United States "should not rush major cuts in defence spending just because the cold war is over." The alternative was a statement that the cold war's end offered a "unique opportunity" to cut military spending and rebuild the U.S. economy.

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Sampras after Grand Slam win

ROME (AP) — Now that he has climbed to No. 1, Pete Sampras sees more to life than his ranking. Like winning a Grand Slam.

He's won one, the U.S. Open, but is now aiming at the French Open and, after that, Wimbledon.

"I was close to winning a couple last year and was disappointed for having missed those chances," Sampras said Monday after winning his first-round match in the Italian Open.

"You can be No. 1, but it is better to win Grand Slam events. I would like to win at least one this year."

Sampras' rival at the top of the rankings, defending Italian Open champion and No. 2 seed Jim Courier, went into action Tuesday against Horacio de la Pena of Argentina, a qualifier.

No. 3 Boris Becker, a three-time Wimbledon champion, faced Andrei Cherkasov of Russia.

Entering his first European tournament on clay since the French Open nearly a year ago, Sampras defeated Italy's Renzo Furlan 6-1, 7-6 (7-3) in his opening match.

He pronounced himself generally satisfied with his game, especially for having stayed off a third set on a hot sunny day at the Foro Italico.

The American saved a match point when Furlan returned a deep service into the net.

"With the crowd heating up, I didn't want to let the set get

away," Sampras said. "I played okay today, but not great," Sampras said.

Looking ahead to the French Open, the only Grand Slam event played on clay, he added, "the more matches I can win here, the better chances I'll have."

No. 4 seed Goran Ivanisevic, another player more at home on faster surfaces, also advanced, defeating Jaime Oncins of Brazil 6-3, 6-7 (5-7) 6-3.

But Jan Siemerink of the Netherlands ousted No. 12 seed Maliva Washington of the United States in straight sets, 6-4, 7-6 (7-5).

The American was the first seeded player eliminated in the \$1,750,000 tournament.

Ivanisevic, a left-handed Croatian who has been slowed by injuries, called it his best match of the season.

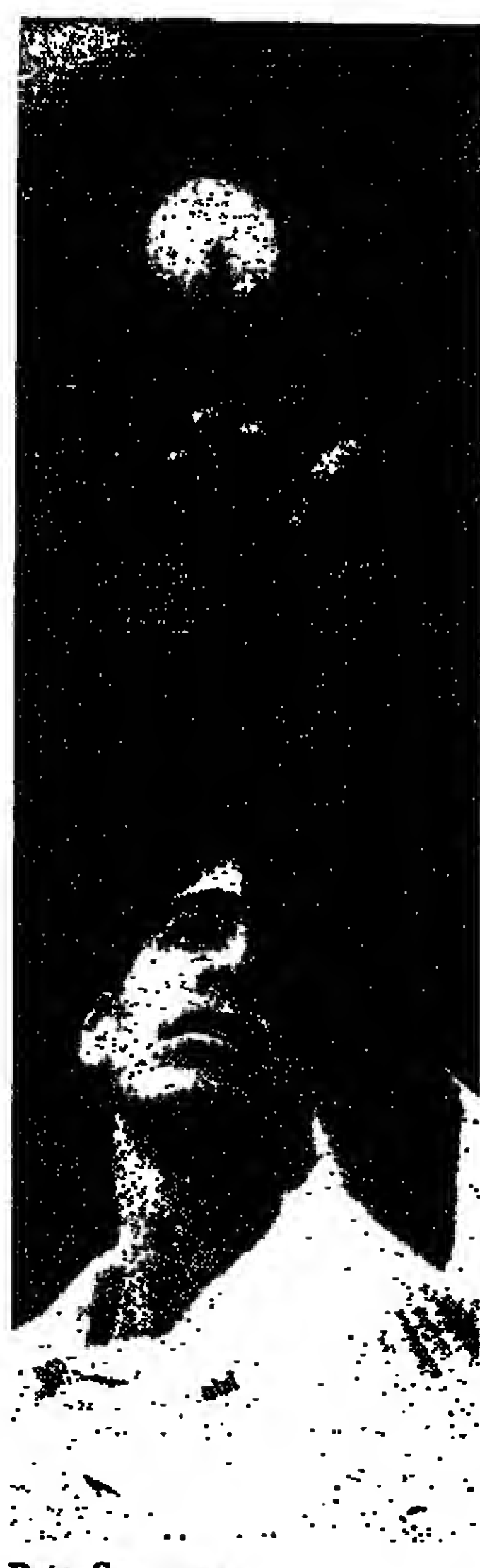
"I'm very happy the way I played," said the Wimbledon finalist. "I'm not 100 per cent but I'm much better."

Ivanisevic, too, is looking for playing time to get in shape for the Grand Slams.

"It's good for me to play, even if I lose. The most important thing for me is to be in good shape for the French Open and Wimbledon."

Meanwhile, the ATP Tour announced it is conducting anti-doping tests during the Italian Open, the first time since implementing stricter penalties in March.

The penalties include suspension and public disclosure for use of stimulants, narcotics such as cocaine, steroids and other substances. All players will be tested.



Pete Sampras
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Holyfield wants to regain title

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Former heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield, who played around with the idea of retiring after losing to Riddick Bowe, said Monday he is ready to take the needed steps to regain the title.

The first of those steps is a June 26 date against Alex Stewart at Atlantic City, N.J.

"I realize I want to be champion," Holyfield said during a stop in New Orleans to promote the 12-round bout. "I feel good and I'm in good shape and I have what it takes to be champion."

Holyfield lost his title in a decision to Bowe on Nov. 13 and spent some time deciding what went wrong. Part of it was his own attitude, Holyfield said.

"In my mind, to win the championship, you have to knock him out," Holyfield said. "I sat there and tried to knock him out instead of boxing."

Holyfield defeated Stewart in 1989, but he said he's not counting on anything.

"People mature," Holyfield said. "You can't take him lightly. I'll have to fight better than I did in '89 to beat him."

Bowe is training for a defence of the IBF and WBA titles against Jesse Ferguson May 22 at Washington. Bowe was stripped of the WBC title for not signing to defend against Lennox Lewis, who defeated him with a one-sided decision against Tony Tucker Saturday night.

Afterwards, Lewis said he wanted to fight Holyfield. That's fine with Holyfield.

"I'm willing to fight whoever's there," Holyfield said. "I came back to fight and not be on the shelf."

Holyfield did not see the Lewis-Tucker fight because he was attending a friend's wedding. But Holyfield said he suspects Lewis is a better boxer than he has been given credit for.

"I don't think anyone can become heavyweight champion without being a great fighter," Holyfield said. "Maybe he hasn't had the chance to show just how good a fighter he is."

Holyfield said he became somewhat weary during a hectic two-year period that consisted of little else but training and fighting.

Table tennis looks at no-glue option

GOTHENBURG (AFP) — The International Table Tennis Federation Monday discussed the possibility of its biggest rule change for more than 30 years — the banning of all glue.

The ITTF, alarmed at reports emphasising the risks of cancer, brain damage and even death from prolonged exposure to glues used on table tennis bats, imposed a sudden ban on all toxic adhesives in December.

But administering the ban has caused confusion and controversy in the past five months because of the problems in distinguishing safe from dangerous adhesives, and the difficulty of detecting offenders.

Hence the ITTF may now be poised to simplify matters by banning all glues — originally used only to attach rubbers to the blades of bats, but which are now known to increase the speed of the ball off the bat by up to 20 per cent.

A proposal to this effect will be put before the biannual general meeting on May 19th. The mood of today's general council meeting was said to be in favour of such a ban.

If so, it could change both tactically a game whose balance of power has in recent years swung towards European men using a fast topspinning style.

ITTF President Ichiro Ogimura of Japan is said to be in favour of a switch to self-adhesive rubbers or double-sided tape, but the President of the European Table Union Hans Gab was argued that the banning of all glues is unnecessary.

If Ogimura's point of view continues to win the

day, as today's informed observers said it had, it will herald the biggest change in table tennis since the "sandwich bat" rule passed in 1959 in Dortmund.

That standardised the make-up of all bats to a fixed-size sandwich of wood, sponge and rubber, thus eliminating the bizarre results created by thick sponge surfaces.

Today's ITTF council meeting also eliminated the fear that leading players might unfairly lose their chances of a world title over the next two weeks by accidentally testing positive with a new detector device.

A machine, containing crystals sensitive to toxic and aromatic substances, is to be used for the first time Tuesday to help detect the use of unsafe glues not on the ITTF's approved list.

This caused some players and managers to express fears that glue in the plywood of the blade or other substances on the rubber might test positive and cause inadvertent disqualification.

Now the punishment for testing positive has been modified to cause withdrawal of the bat and not disqualification of the competitor.

Play in the World Championships starts Tuesday with the men's and women's team events in which England will unilaterally impose a total ban on all glue for its players, thus consigning them to a disadvantage in the interest of health safety.

A record entry from 87 countries includes team from Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Ondruska puts medical ambitions on hold

HAMBURG (AFP) — He wanted to be a doctor but Marcos Ondruska had to put those plans on hold.

The 20-year-old from Pretoria, now transplanted from South Africa to Germany after his family moved to Munich two years ago, is keeping busy on the tennis courts these days.

Having risen 40 places this year to reach 27 in the world, Ondruska has enlisted the help of former top ten player Miloslav Mecir in a bid to add a good clay court game to his expertise on hard courts.

His direction may be clearly up the tennis ladder now, but at 16 he didn't really know where he would be heading.

"I did well at school and there were a lot of channels open to me, but I'm playing well and my tennis career is doing well and I think this is what I'll be doing for a while."

Moving from South Africa was difficult for him, and he misses the place he still calls home.

"I'm hardly ever there lately. This year I've been down twice in the last month, which is more than I went the whole of last year. I went for the Davis Cup for a week and I went down for a tournament for a week."

The link-up with Mecir came through his father. His parents are, like Mecir, Czech and the arrangement is for them to work together until the U.S. Open in September.

Ondruska's adaptation has worked so well that in Hamburg he took Ivan Lendl to 6-4 in the 3rd set before conceding the battle, demonstrating the consistency he was seeking in rallies. The ball often crossed the net fifty or sixty times.

Playing Lendl was special to Ondruska who admits he was a childhood idol.

"He's a hard worker and I like the way he can dedicate himself and commit himself," Ondruska explained.

Parma poised to launch Italian grand slam

LONDON (AFP) — European football history is sure to be made at Wembley Wednesday when Italian side Parma meet Belgium's Royal Antwerp in the final of the Cup Winners' Cup.

Neither club have won a European trophy before. Indeed, before this season Parma had only ever played one European tie.

Nevertheless, it is the rising Serie A side who are expected to break their European duck Wednesday night and win only their second major trophy.

Even Antwerp regard them as favourites for the cup, having ridden their luck to reach their first European final.

Veteran striker Alex Zvernatynski, the Belgian international who scored one of the three goals in the second-leg semi-final win over Spartak Moscow, admitted: "Even most Belgians do not rate our chances."

"But they forget we knocked out a very good Spartak Moscow side in the semi-final, so we deserve to be at Wembley."

Antwerp had to go to extra time before squeezing past Austria's Admira Wacker and then in the quarter-final only eliminated Steaua Bucharest on the away goals rule.

However, Parma are their final place to the same rule, having beaten Atletico Madrid in the semi-finals that way after losing the home leg 1-0.

Central to Parma's success has been the Colombian striker, Faustino Asprilla.

Antwerp coach Walter Meeuwis, formerly in charge of the national side, is a shrewd operator, but the chances are that Belgium's oldest club are likely to become the first victims of Italy's European grand slam bid, however.

Juventus already have one hand on the UEFA Cup after beating Borussia Dortmund 3-1 in Germany in the first leg of the final.

AC Milan are strong favourites

Italian soccer briefs

* Van Basten back to his best

Milan: Marco Van Basten, the AC Milan forward widely considered the world's best player, came through his first full match for five months without any reaction from his operated ankle. The Dutch striker's return Sunday inspired his club to their first win for two months.

He scored with a header in the 3-1 win over Ancona and is now looking forward to both the European Cup final at the end of the month and a return to World Cup duty for Holland against Norway June 9.

* ... which could be bad news for Papin

Milan: The return from injury of Van Basten could mean Jean-Pierre Papin will miss out the European Cup final against his old club Olympique Marseille. A fit Van Basten is an automatic choice for coach Fabio Capello, as is his compatriot Frank Rijkaard. That leaves him able to name only one more foreigner from four on the books.

Capello does not regard Van Basten and Papin as the ideal partnership upfront, leaving Ruud Gullit, who is due to sign a new one-year contract this week, as favourite to play.

"Obviously I would love to play but if it doesn't happen the earth won't stop turning," Papin reflected.

* Vialli homesick for Genoa

Turin: Gianluca Vialli wants to leave Juventus and return to Sampdoria in Genoa but the

Turin club's coach Giovanni Trapattoni would like him to stay, despite the slump in form that has cost him his international place.

"Vialli came to see and told me of his intention to return to Genoa, but neither I nor the club have thought for a second of letting him go," Trapattoni declared.

* Skuhravy signs new deal

GENOA: Czech striker Tomas Skuhravy has signed a new contract that will keep him at Genoa for another three years.

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Lewis given go-ahead to return to Celtics

BOSTON (AP) — Boston Celtics star guard Reggie Lewis has been given the go-ahead to resume his basketball career as doctors dismissed fears that he was suffering from a heart disorder. "I'm really sure that I can (play with total confidence)," the 27-year-old Lewis told a news conference Monday. "I think that's why it's taken so long for us to come up with a statement, because we wanted to be 100 per cent sure that I will be able to go back and lead a normal life and do what I would like to do." Dr. Gilbert Mudd, the director of cardiology at Brigham and Women's Hospital, told the news conference that Lewis suffered from "blood flow" problem in his brain and not from heart disease. Lewis passed out during Boston's 112-101 victory over the Charlotte Hornets April 29 and did not play in the remainder of the playoff series, which Charlotte won 3-1.

Rijkaard to play 1 more season at Milan

MILAN (R) — Dutch midfielder Frank Rijkaard will play just one more season for Italian champions elect AC Milan before seeing out his career in a more relaxed environment. "We have reached an agreement on the extension of Rijkaard's contract. It will be for one more season," Milan director Adriano Galliani told the Gazzetta Dello Sport Tuesday. "There will not be an option to extend it further. Next year will be the last, in line with Frank's stated wishes," he added. Rijkaard, 31 in September, said he wanted to leave European Cup finalists Milan before his abilities began to wane. "I won't always be able to play at the same level, the future scares me," Rijkaard said. "I want to leave Milan, a club which has given me everything, before I start to go downhill."

Lendl humiliated in first round

ROME (AFP) — World number seven Ivan Lendl succumbed to Uruguayan clay-court specialist Marcelo Filippini in the first round of the Italian Open Tuesday. The 33-year-old American, three time winner of the French Open, went down 6-2, 6-1 to the sound of whistles from the disappointed fans, who booed Czech-born Lendl as he lost 11 points in a row. This humiliation comes just a fortnight after Lendl won the ATP tournament in Munich, having reached the final in Nice the week before. He also

reached the quarter-finals in Hamburg last week, but his form in Rome seemed to have deserted him entirely.

Atlanta Hawks fire head coach

ATLANTA (AP) — The Atlanta Hawks fired head coach Bob Weiss Monday after three seasons, including two that ended in first-round defeats in the NBA playoffs. General Manager Pete Babcock said he was not renewing Weiss' contract because he was dissatisfied with the Hawks' 43-39 record this season. He said he hoped to have a replacement by early June, but had no specific timetable. The Hawks made it to the playoffs this year after failing to do so last year, but they lost three straight games to the Chicago Bulls in the best-of-5 first round. In three seasons, Weiss' record with the Hawks was 124-122. Atlanta made it to the playoffs his first year, 1990-91, only to lose to Detroit 3-2 in the first round.

200 arrested for vandalism after Mexico victory

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Two hundred people were arrested for vandalism in the revelry that followed Mexico's 2-1 victory over Canada in a World Cup soccer qualifying match, the news agency Excelsior reported Monday. The arrests came after thousands of fans poured into the streets to celebrate after Mexico's national team defeated Canada at Toronto Sunday. About 20 people were treated for injuries, none serious, news reports said. By defeating Canada, the Mexican team advanced to the 1994 World Cup, the first team to qualify for the 24-nation tournament. Defending champion Germany and the United States as host country qualify automatically.

Pagliuca faces 3-month lay-off after crash

GENOA (R) — Italian international goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca faces a three month layoff after breaking his collarbone in a car crash, doctors said Tuesday. They said Pagliuca was comfortable after crashing on a stretch on motorway south of Genoa Monday afternoon. His metallic blue Porsche sports car was a write-off after it hurtled into a lorry and then a crash barrier as Pagliuca tried to avoid a truck. The 26-year-old Sampdoria man, who also suffered cuts to his face and minor damage to a lung, was saved from more serious injury by the car's air bag.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANIA MURPHY
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♦ A K Q 9 7 3
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SOUTH
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4♥ Pass 6♥ Pass

Opening lead: Two of ♠
There are all sorts of awards handed out each year for hands bid, played or defended with great skill. We propose honoring the "Luckiest Hand of the Year." This one, from the recent European Mixed Championships sponsored by Philip Morris, would be a leading contender. North-South were playing weak

no-trump openers not vulnerable. East's decision to stay out of the auction had to be based on the hope the opponents would land in a no-trump contract and then be in for an unpleasant surprise. The decision proved disastrous when the North-South auction took off and South landed in a club slam which would have had no play at all with a diamond lead.

Even after the heart salvo, declarer's prospects were not rosy. But David Burn of Great Britain found the way home. He won the first trick in hand, drew trumps in two rounds and then continued hearts. The first stroke of fortune came when the suit broke 3-3, allowing declarer to discard a diamond from the table. Next came the ace and king of spades, followed by the jack of diamonds. East was forced to win and, left with nothing but diamonds, continue the suit, allowing declarer to discard a spade from hand while ruffing on the board.

Let's see: No diamond lead, hearts 3-3, spades 4-2 and the A K Q of diamonds all in the hand with the short spades. In our collective lifetimes we've been in some pretty bad contracts, but few have come as close to 0 percent chance of success as this one.

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Croat-Muslim battle continues; Belgrade calls meeting on peace plan

SARAJEVO (Agencies) — Fighting flared again between Muslim and Croat forces in the southern Bosnian town of Mostar Tuesday, despite a ceasefire and appeals from leaders of the two communities to stop it.

A U.N. spokesman said hand-to-hand fighting and artillery battles which began Sunday and continued on Monday had abated overnight. But on Tuesday morning sporadic small arms and mortar fire could be observed in the city.

Croatian radio accused Muslim soldiers of bombarding the main Bosnian Croat Forces (HVO) headquarters in Mostar with mortars, saying one soldier had been injured.

"This is the Muslim reply to the ceasefire. It seems the Muslims want war," the radio quoted an HVO officer in the headquarters as saying.

The commander of the Bosnian Muslim army, Sefer Halilovic, and the chief of the HVO, Milivoj Petkovic, were meeting in the town of Kiseljak, near Sarajevo, to work out how to implement the ceasefire so far ignored by their forces.

Recent fighting between Croats and Muslims, former allies in the civil war against rebel Serbs, appeared to mark a new attempt to stake out turf in central Bosnia ahead of possible implementation of an international peace plan for the republic.

The United Nations Security

Council in New York condemned the Croats for attacking the Muslims in central and southern Bosnia and demanded that the offensive stop at once.

Yugoslav, Serbian and Montenegrin leaders meanwhile called on Bosnian Serbs to attend a joint parliamentary session to decide whether to accept the international peace plan for Bosnia, Tanjug news agency said.

The meeting should be held in Belgrade Friday instead of a referendum on the peace plan scheduled for next weekend, the Belgrade based agency said.

The call followed talks in Belgrade attended by Federal Yugoslav President Bobanovic, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, Montenegrin President Momir Bulatovic and Goran Hadzic, president of the Serb Krajina region of Croatia.

Mr. Milosevic, in an interview with Tanjug, said: "The decision on the peace plan concerns Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, Krajina and the Bosnian Serb republic."

This meant a decision on the peace plan worked out by mediators Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen should not be taken by the Bosnian Serbs alone, he said.

Mr. Milosevic has been pressing the Bosnian Serbs to accept the Vance-Owen plan, but the Bosnian Serb parliament rejected it last week and said it should be decided by a referendum on May 15 and 16.



Passers-by look Tuesday at pictures of people killed in grenade attack last week in central Bosnian town of Zenica (AFP photo)

Washington said Monday it was putting off any decision on further action because European allies had asked it to wait until after the referendum this weekend.

The Bosnian Serb assembly rejected the peace plan last week but agreed to call a vote among its people. The United States has dismissed the move as a cynical ploy, designed to win the Serbs more time.

U.S. President Bill Clinton warned Tuesday that continued fighting in Bosnia could spill over into nearby countries and threaten the stability of democracy in Europe.

Mr. Clinton also complained that the arms embargo on Bosnia has given Bosnian Serbs an unfair advantage in the civil war.

"We want to try and confine that conflict so it doesn't spread

into other places, like Albania and Greece and Turkey, which could have the impact of undermining the peace in Europe and the growth and stability of democracy there," Mr. Clinton said at a meeting with students at a Chicago suburban school.

"I think the United Nations, the world community, can do more," said Mr. Clinton, who has been trying to win allied support for possible military air strikes against Bosnian Serb positions unless they fully accept the U.N.-brokered peace accord.

He also defended the possible lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia, something several European leaders have opposed for fear it would only worsen the violence.

Mr. Clinton complained that the U.N. embargo, which was

ignored by the Serb-dominated Yugoslav government, has had the wrong effect.

"The practical impact of the arms embargo that the United Nations imposed was to give the entire weaponry of the Yugoslav army to the Serbian Bosnians and deprive any kind of equal weaponry to the people fighting against them," Mr. Clinton said.

"So the global community has, not on purpose, but inadvertently had a huge impact on the outcome of that war in ways that have been very bad," he said.

Earlier, as the ceasefire between Serb and government forces continued to hold in the rest of Bosnia, Bosnian Serb television gave wide coverage to politicians and people in the street who favoured a no vote in the referendum.

Iraq: 250,000 died because of sanctions

NICOSIA (AP) — A member of Iraq's ruling Revolutionary Command Council said Tuesday that 250,000 Iraqis have died as a result of economic sanctions against the country, including 100,000 children.

The Iraqi News Agency (INA) reported that Vice-President Taha Mohieddin Marouf presented the figures at the National Conference for the Iraqi Child in Baghdad.

The agency said Mr. Marouf "added that the blockade is still threatening the lives of hundreds of thousands of children, women and elderly people, through the execution of the worst anti-humanitarian campaign in contemporary history" and said the embargo violated all international conventions.

Iraq has a population of 18 million.

In a later dispatch, INA quoted health minister Omid Mshat Mubarak as telling the conference that one million Iraqi children under five years are suffering different kinds of diseases because of malnutrition.

In New York, U.N. Sanctions Committee chairman Clarence Christopher O'Brien said he was not aware of Baghdad's fatality figures. He said the Iraqi government never had presented them to his committee.

"And if they did, we would look at it rather critically because the exemptions in the system are intended precisely to avoid that scenario" of widespread suffering and death, Mr. O'Brien asserted.

Mr. Marouf said the sanctions, imposed after Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait, deprive Iraqi children of essential food and medicine. Although those items are exempt from the sanctions, Iraq cannot afford enough of them because its primary com-

modity, oil, is banned from the world market.

Mr. Marouf is the only Kurd on President Saddam Hussein's command council. He "called upon international organisations concerned with the welfare of children to demand the immediate lifting of the blockade and releasing the frozen Iraqi assets so as to enable Iraq to get the necessary food, medicines and other human needs," the news agency said in a dispatch monitored in Nicosia.

Mr. O'Brien said that although Iraqi assets have been frozen, the committee still had approved a "very high" amount of food, medical and humanitarian-related imports: 600,000 metric tons.

Iraq has released a number of people it died as a result of the sanctions.

The Sanctions Committee is due to meet Tuesday to renew the sanctions for a 60-day period.

Some of Iraq's previous reports have been supported by independent sources.

A Harvard school of public health study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine in September 1992, said that in the first seven months of 1991 about 47,000 more children died than would have been expected before the Gulf war.

Researchers said the deaths resulted largely from an outbreak of diarrhoea caused by disabled water and sewer systems.

The water and sewer systems have been repaired since the end of the war in 1991, but the Iraqis say the problem now is that small children, and the elderly, are not getting proper nutrition to help them fight off diseases, and there are shortages of medicines needed to treat them.

Storm clouds gather over Italy's ex-communist PDS

ROME (R) — Italy's former communists were in danger of being sucked into the country's huge corruption scandal Tuesday when one of the old party's top officials was arrested in a bribery probe of the state railways.

Judicial sources said Renato Polini, former administrative secretary of the old Communist Party, now renamed as the PDS, was detained in Florence on charges of suspected illegal financing of political parties.

The PDS (Democratic Party of the Left) has strongly denied receiving funds from groups pitching for contracts from the Ferrovie dello Stato (FS) railway network.

"These reports are just a defamatory press campaign," said a PDS spokesman Tuesday.

The new blow to the PDS coincides with a walkout by a 30-strong leftist faction in protest at the decision by party leader Achille Occhetto to back the new government of Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi.

Rome magistrates are investigating whether the PDS received illegal money while it had an appointee on the board of the railway company up until 1988.

Their counterparts in Milan also want to know whether it was among parties suspected from contracts awarded for Italy's high-speed rail network.

Last week police arrested a Bergamo businessman, Pietro Tognoli, on charges of having paid a \$1 million bribe to the railway company over several months in 1991 and 1992 to win a \$165 million contract to supply track sleepers and stabilisers.

Mr. Tognoli is suspected of having a link between 15 businessmen, co-operative group leaders and government officials for whom arrest warrants were issued on Monday.

Italy's largest opposition party, the PDS portrays itself as a beacon of virtue as a 15-month corruption scandal mauls its Socialist and Christian Democrat (DC) rivals.

Secretary Occhetto is the only main party leader to have survived the scandal so far.

But he too is under increasing attack, both from Massimo D'Alema, leader of the party's political deputies who wants his job and from left-wingers who believe the 57-year-old Occhetto is betraying his roots.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Gunmen linked to Bombay blast kingpin shot dead

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Bombay police have shot dead two gunmen of a Dubai-based Indian ganglord suspected to be the mastermind behind the March bombings which left 300 people dead in the western Indian city. The Press Trust of India (PTI) identified the slain gangsters as Dinesh Pujari and Ravi Sorate and said they died in a Monday night gunbattle near a sports stadium in Bombay's upscale Juhu residential district. The two gunmen refused to stop at a security checkpoint and fired on the police when challenged, the news agency said. The officers manning the post returned fire, killing the two on the spot. PTI said the pair were wanted for an unspecified number of murders in Bombay, India's financial hub, and elsewhere. It said Pujari and Sorate, both Hindus, were hired gunmen of Dawood Ibrahim, the Dubai-based ganglord accused by the Bombay police of masterminding the March 12 chain of explosions. Police say Ibrahim supplied the explosives to his men, and after the attack helped two of the chief suspects escape to Dubai from Bombay. More than 70 people, including a top film actor have been arrested so far in connection with the bombings, India's worst terrorist strike.

U.S. envoy Lord starts China talks

BEIJING (R) — Winston Lord, the most senior Clinton administration State Department official to visit China, began talks in Beijing Tuesday on "important bilateral, regional and international issues," the U.S. embassy said. An embassy spokeswoman said Mr. Lord, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, would raise serious concerns the United States has about China in the areas of human rights, non-proliferation and trade. Many political analysts say the Lord visit, scheduled to end on Wednesday, as a key to the new Sino-U.S. relationship. They say the former U.S. ambassador to Beijing is the man most responsible for forming President Bill Clinton's views on China. Mr. Clinton must decide by June 3 how to handle the issue of Beijing's most favoured nation trade status, worth billions of dollars to China's economy.

Russia coup trial delayed until May 18

MOSCOW (AP) — Resumption of the trial of 12 communists hard-liners accused of mounting the August 1991 coup has been delayed again to May 18, because one defendant remains hospitalised, an official said Tuesday. Alexander Tizyakov, who fell ill on the first day of the trial April 14, was still unable to attend the reopening scheduled for Wednesday so the trial was put off, said court spokesman Viktor Pavlenok, according to the Itar-TASS news agency. The second delay came nearly a week after the supreme court rejected a request by prosecutors to jail three of the alleged ringleaders because of their political activities during protests by communist supporters on May Day. The court had said that former Soviet Parliament Speaker Anatoly Lukyanov, ex-Soviet Vice President Gennady Yanayev and former KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov did not do anything that could interfere with the case.

Defence cuts will cost a million U.S. jobs

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. defence cuts will mean the loss of a million civilian jobs between now and 1997, most of them in manufacturing, according to an official study published Monday. Planned defence cuts will take spending down from \$292 billion in 1987 to \$192 billion in 1997, and armed forces personnel will be reduced from \$2.12 million to 1.4 million. The Labour Department study said that this would mean the loss of 286,000 jobs in service industries, 139,000 in retailing, 62,000 in transport and 594,000 in manufacturing. Of the manufacturing jobs lost, 57,000 would be in aeronautics, 35,000 in shipyards and 37,000 in missile making. The forecast for the manufacturing sector is particularly worrying given that it is already at its nearest since June 1965, employing 18 million people in April this year after losing 65,000 jobs in that month alone.

Germany's SPD to elect leader after summer break

BONN (R) — Germany's opposition Social Democrats (SPD) will delay choosing its new leader until parliament returns from its summer recess, the party's caretaker leader Johannes Rau said. The SPD, the main opposition party in Bonn, was left leaderless last week after its Chairman Joerg Engholm resigned over a six-year old scandal. Mr. Rau said that the party would choose a new chairman at its annual congress, which was originally planned for November but will be brought forward by six to eight weeks. He was speaking after a seven-hour meeting of SPD officials.

Kidnapped boy freed in Philippines

ZAMBOANGA (AP) — A group that had kidnapped a Spanish priest handed over its last remaining hostage, a five-year-old boy, to military authorities Tuesday, the military announced. The kidnappers requested a ceasefire with troops who had been pursuing them and, 90 minutes after it began, they freed Anthony Biel, who had been seized more than three months ago, said armed forces spokesman Benjamin Enrile. The boy was in good health, he added. The spokesman said the military then agreed to a 90-minute extension of the ceasefire before resuming its offensive against the Muslim fundamentalist group on Basilan island, about 680 kilometres south of Manila. "The operation will continue until the end," he said. "The order of the chief of staff is to finish the operation. We have to run after these kidnappers." Estimates of the number in the kidnap group range from 60 to 200. About 28 have been reported killed since the operation against them began last week.

80 injured in S. Korean protests

SEOUL (AP) — About 80 people have been injured in clashes between militant students and riot police in Kwangju, a southern city preparing to mark the 13th anniversary of a bloody anti-government uprising, police said Tuesday. The clashes late Monday were triggered by the largest and most violent anti-government protests since President Kim Young-Sam took office in February. Students hurling rocks and wielding steel and wooden sticks fought about 1,500 riot police who fired tear gas canisters, police said. Dozens of students and police were injured, they said. Three hours later, about 2,000 students assembled near central Kwangju, about 240 kilometres south of Seoul, to confront a roughly equal number of riot police, officers said.

Iran to deploy 100,000-strong force for election

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran is to deploy a 100,000-strong force to maintain security during next month's presidential election, Brigadier-General Reza Seifolahi said Tuesday. "Organising the sixth presidential election burdens the disciplinary forces with a heavy responsibility," the commander told Abrar newspaper. "Therefore, a force of 100,000 will be mobilised." Five candidates, including the incumbent Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, are reported to have been approved to run for the June 11 election. The Council of Guardians, an election watchdog, will announce the final list by Thursday.

Austria dismisses report of Swedish spy

VIENNA (R) — Austria Tuesday dismissed a Stockholm television report that Sig Bergling, Sweden's most notorious spy, was living in Vienna. "There is no proof that Bergling is in Austria or Vienna," an Interior Ministry spokesman said. "This is unfounded speculation." Mr. Bergling, a former security police officer jailed for life in 1979 for spying on behalf of the then Soviet Union, fled with his wife while on an unsupervised visit to her flat in Stockholm, and apparently headed for Moscow. Sweden's TV-4 television, quoting reliable sources, reported Tuesday that Mr. Bergling had fled to the then Soviet Union in 1987, and had moved to Vienna in 1991 where he was now living with his wife. The masterspy, said by the prosecution to have passed on defence and security information to Moscow, has undergone a facial operation to disguise his identity, the report added. "The Austrian security police have no evidence to support this claim," the ministry spokesman said. The ease of Mr. Bergling's escape caused political uproar and led to the resignation of Sweden's justice minister.

COLUMN

More than half of Spanish 15-year-olds smoke

SEVILLE, Spain (R) — More than half of Spanish children smoke by the age of 15, more than in any other European Community country, the Spanish Lung and Chest Surgery Society said. It said about 14 per cent of 11-year-olds were regular or sporadic smokers, rising to 38 per cent for 13-year-olds and 58 per cent by the age of 15. The society said there had been a sharp rise in the number of women and children smokers in the past few years. Smoking kills between 30,000 and 40,000 people a year in Spain. Health Ministry figures show.

Third of Chinese adults smoke

PEKING (R) — Almost 300 million Chinese are regular smokers — about 35 per cent of the adult population — with the deadly habit most popular among people in their 20s, according to a survey by the State Statistics Bureau. "Statistics show that among the smokers in China, people aged between 21 and 30 account for the largest proportion, with 19.32 per cent. Most of them began to smoke before the age of 20," the official Xinhua News Agency said Tuesday. The survey, conducted among 180,000 people across China, showed that the smoking rate was highest in the central province of Henan, where 41.5 per cent of adults smoke.

U.S. to market 1st female condom

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wisconsin's Pharmacia Co. said Monday it has received approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to market its country's first female condom. The FDA said two weeks ago that it was ready to license the company's Reality Condom because it affords women some protection against sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS, as well as against pregnancy. The female condom in tests had a 26 per cent failure rate in preventing pregnancy, and the FDA still stresses that male latex condoms are a better safeguard against both pregnancy and disease. But the new condom affords women a chance to protect themselves when their partner refuses to use a male condom. The female condom is a sheath worn by the woman. The company plans to sell reality nationwide by the end of the year for \$2.50.

Angry mob digs up corpse and burns it

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — An angry mob of blacks dug up the body of an alleged gangster hours after he was buried, then dragged the corpse through the streets and set it alight. Clement "Yster" Jonase, who was shot dead on May 1, was believed to be the leader of the "Toaster Gang," which waged a "reign of terror" in the Temba black township east of Johannesburg, according to the Sowetan newspaper. Jonase also was a supporter of the Inkatha Freedom Party, a Zulu political movement, and a number of Inkatha members attended his funeral Sunday evening. After the ceremony, the Inkatha supporters rampaged through Tembisa, looting houses and leaving one person dead, police said. Incensed residents then went to the grave site and exhumed Jonase's corpse, dragged it five kilometres through the streets, then burned his body at a taxi depot. When police learned of the incident, they found Jonase's charred remains and a handwritten poster that read, "this is the burned out body of Yster."

Archaeologists find 4,200-year-old writing

PEKING (AP) — Chinese archaeologists have discovered inscriptions on a 4,200-year-old piece of pottery that suggest the Chinese writing system is 1,000 years older than previously believed, an official report said. A team of archaeologists was excavating the remains of a 4,200-year-old city in Dinggong village, Shandong province, when it found the broken pottery vessel, the Xinhua News Agency reported. On the bottom are at least 11 engraved characters that do not resemble any Chinese writing system known. The report said no one has deciphered the characters yet. "Since the vessel was found at a 4,200-year-old site, it could mean that the Chinese created writing about 1,000 years earlier than the Jiaoguan script," said Shao Wuping, a researcher at Peking University. Jiaoguan script, believed to be the earliest form of Chinese writing, was scratched on bones or tortoise shells, and dates to the Shang dynasty of the 16th to 11th centuries B.C.

Leftists

(Continued from page 1)

gations of these parties into one, is not seen in the near future, he said.

The JDPUP, the JDP and JSDP, Mr. Khawaja said, prefer to enter the election in "the broadest democratic alliance possible" based on the strengthening and institutionalisation of democracy, rejecting the normalisation of relations with Israel and ending the Arab

economic boycott of the Jewish state, solving Jordan's debt problem and reducing unemployment and fighting "American domination" of the region.

"We (the leftist parties) find ourselves forced to enter the parliamentary elections in coalitions," he said. If there is no coordination among the leftist parties, he added, their chances of securing a victory will be slim.

Preparations for the parliamentary elections, he said, are ongoing at the Jordan Arab

National Democratic Alliance, which includes leftist and pan-Arab parties as well as independent figures. July will be the deadline for all decisions to be made regarding the elections, according to Mr. Khawaja.

In the meantime, leftist parties are calling for a radical change of the current election law, demanding a block-voting system based on proportional representation in Parliament. They argue that this will be a more just and democratic law.

Iraq opens border crossing

(Continued from page 1)

"Swiss notes" was within the country, and the invalidation move took out of circulation more than 25 billion dinars — officially worth over \$80 billion but less than \$500 million in pre-invalidation rates in the black market. The move effectively pulled the rug from under the feet of the hoarders in the Gulf.

Hit badly in the bargain were also Jordanian speculators and traders who held at least 500 million Iraqi dinars in "Swiss" notes with hopes of high profits as and when the sanctions against Iraq were lifted or relaxed. Some of the money was taken out by traders with permission from the Iraqi government in payment for goods and services.

Many of them are still banking on hopes that the Jordanian government would be somehow successful in its efforts to secure Iraq compensation for Jordanians' losses. Initial contacts by the authorities were described as "not encouraging," but sources said the effort was continuing.

Tankers carrying Iraqi oil were among the first vehicles to be allowed out of Iraq after the closure was lifted Tuesday midnight.

Double-parked empty tankers clogged the main Amman-Baghdad highway near border post awaiting their turn to go in along with trucks which had been stranded there since

Wednesday.

"Jordan and Iraq have reached an agreement that the volume of the daily supply will be increased to make up for the shortfall caused in Jordan's strategic reserves," said Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Ali Abul Ragheb.

According to experts on Jordan's oil situation, the dent was insignificant in the Kingdom's reserves of fuel oil and oil byproducts, and crude oil reserves and liquid gas were two areas where the reserves had actually been pushed down by the halt in flow.

The Iraqi oil supply to Jordan — of about 50,000 barrels of crude oil and 25,000 barrels of fuel oil every day — is exempt from the international sanctions and trade embargo imposed on Iraq following its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Jordanian security forces were Wednesday carrying out stringent inspection of all incoming and outgoing vehicles at six checkpoints within 100 kilometres of Rweished.

At least one truck carrying 400 semi-used tyres into Iraq was intercepted at the border point, with the driver being told to collect his contraband consignment from the Amman customs house after paying a fine — not less than JD 2 per tyre — for the aborted smuggling attempt.

Hundreds of trucks laden with foodstuff and relief supplies, including shipments arranged by international organisations, had been waiting at

the border since early Wednesday. And each of them faced strict inspection at both sides, travellers said.

Only a few Iraqis crossed into Jordan Tuesday, and officials and businessmen arriving from Baghdad said a high travel tax imposed by the government was preventing many Iraqis from leaving.

Officially valued at nearly \$50,000, the travel tax equals around \$300 in the black market.

"Only traders and the rich can afford the 15,000-Iraqi-dinar travel tax per head," said an Iraqi businessman who was among the first to cross. He said the levy had "effectively curbed the number of Iraqi women who regularly visit Jordan to sell their belongings and some of the cheap stuff available in Iraq."

The businessman said the government had cancelled all mandatory exit visas issued to Iraqis prior to the imposition of the travel tax two weeks ago.

"Those who wish to travel have to have new permission which is granted upon payment of the tax," he said.

The businessman and others who arrived Tuesday said the dollar had fallen by almost one-third in the Iraqi market after the invalidation of the "Swiss" notes.

"I did not see any significant number of Iraqis crowding Iraqi banks as reported in the papers," said Nadeem Dajani, a Jordanian businessman. "It seemed that very little of the cancelled currency was in Iraq, and the government had timed the invalidation perfectly."

Washington peace talks continue

(Continued from page 1)

— An end to the closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip;

— International aid for Palestinian institutions including a contribution from the United States, Israel's biggest backer.

Muawaffaq Al Allaf, the chief Syrian negotiator, said meanwhile the Syrian-Israeli negotiations had entered the stage of discussing security issues.

It marked a significant turn in the Israeli-Syrian track since the Syrians had been resisting Israeli calls for discussions on security issues saying such matters could be tackled only after Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

"Nearly all of yesterday's meetings dealt with security issues," Mr. Allaf told reporters.

"There is a possibility of agreement on security issues if Israel accepts the principles for security issues and security guarantees," he said. These prin-

ciples, he added, are: No security measure should affect the rights, sovereignty and territorial integrity of another party and should not come "at the expense of another."

"Any security agreement should be on equal footing between the two parties," he said.

"There is agreement on this," he said. But it is only part of the issues on the table, he added referring to Israeli withdrawal and other related matters.

While Syria has insisted it would not accept a separate peace with Israel in the absence of an overall Arab-Israeli settlement, the statements appeared to indicate a new flexibility in the Syrian position.

The Israeli-Syrian negotiations in the ninth round have bogged down over the issue of the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967.

Syria has offered what it calls total peace in exchange for full Israeli withdrawal from the

heights, but Israel has pressed for a fuller explanation of the definition of peace proposed by Damascus.

Israeli negotiators said they were encouraged by comments from Syria that indicate a flexibility in their approach to the talks.

Statements by Syrian President Hafez Al Assad over the weekend and earlier statements by Foreign Minister Farouq Al Sharaa "and what we hear here, bring us to the conclusion that we are quite close on this one," Itamar Rabinovich, the chief negotiator to the Syrian talks said.

Mr. Rabinovich said the two sides were close to agreement on general principles, but not on an overall peace agreement, which is snagged on the question of the Golan Heights.

Mr. Assad was quoted Monday in the London-based Arab newspaper Al Wasat saying that the Arab-Israeli conflict in general had to be addressed, but that separate bilateral could proceed at different speeds.